Curtis 02271

Realms of Fantasy

We Pick the TOP 10 FANTASY FILMS

Terri Windling

Kay Nielsen's Golden Age

Sleeping Beauty Revisited

THEODORA GOSS

Myth of the Golden Apple

RICHARD PARKS

April 2002

$3.99US $5.99CAN

04>

0 74470 02271 8

RETAILER: DISPLAY UNTIL APRIL 1

Death Trip 2001

Made friends, made enemies, and almost died
~can't wait to go back!

Me battling vile olthoi insects in Marae Lassel

My millionth pyreal coin—ah... the joy of being a monarch

~ claw from nearly lost arm

Note to Self:
Olthoi breed deadlier than last month

gauze from wound on nearly lost arm

Dusk lily from my 2nd trip to Marae Lassel

My house, Southern Osteth

purchased in March

Weapons stored here:
~Quiddity Sword
~Pyreal Axe

My precious focusing stone allows me to, well, focus.

TEEN T ESRB INTERACTIVE
TURBINE
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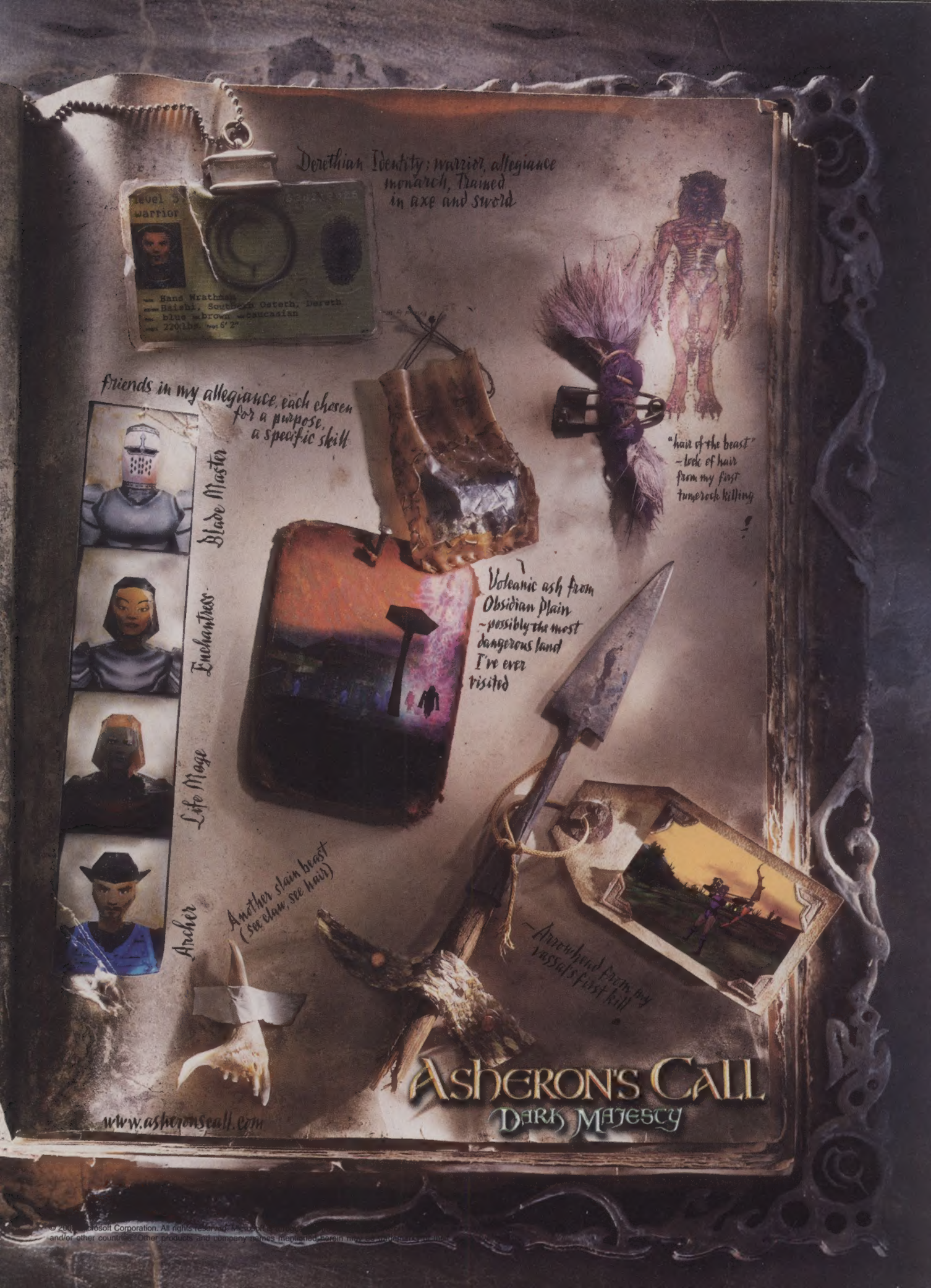
Dorethian Identity: warrior, allegiance monarch, Trained in axe and sword
level 5
warrior
Hand Wrathmar
Baishi, Southern Osteth, Dereth
blue brown caucasian
220lbs 6' 2"
friends in my allegiance, each chosen for a purpose, a specific skill
Blade Master
Enchantress
Life Mage
Archer
"hair of the beast" - lock of hair from my first tunderock killing
Volcanic ash from Obsidian Plain - possibly the most dangerous land I've ever visited
Another slain beast (see claw, see hair)
- Arrowhead from my vassal's first kill
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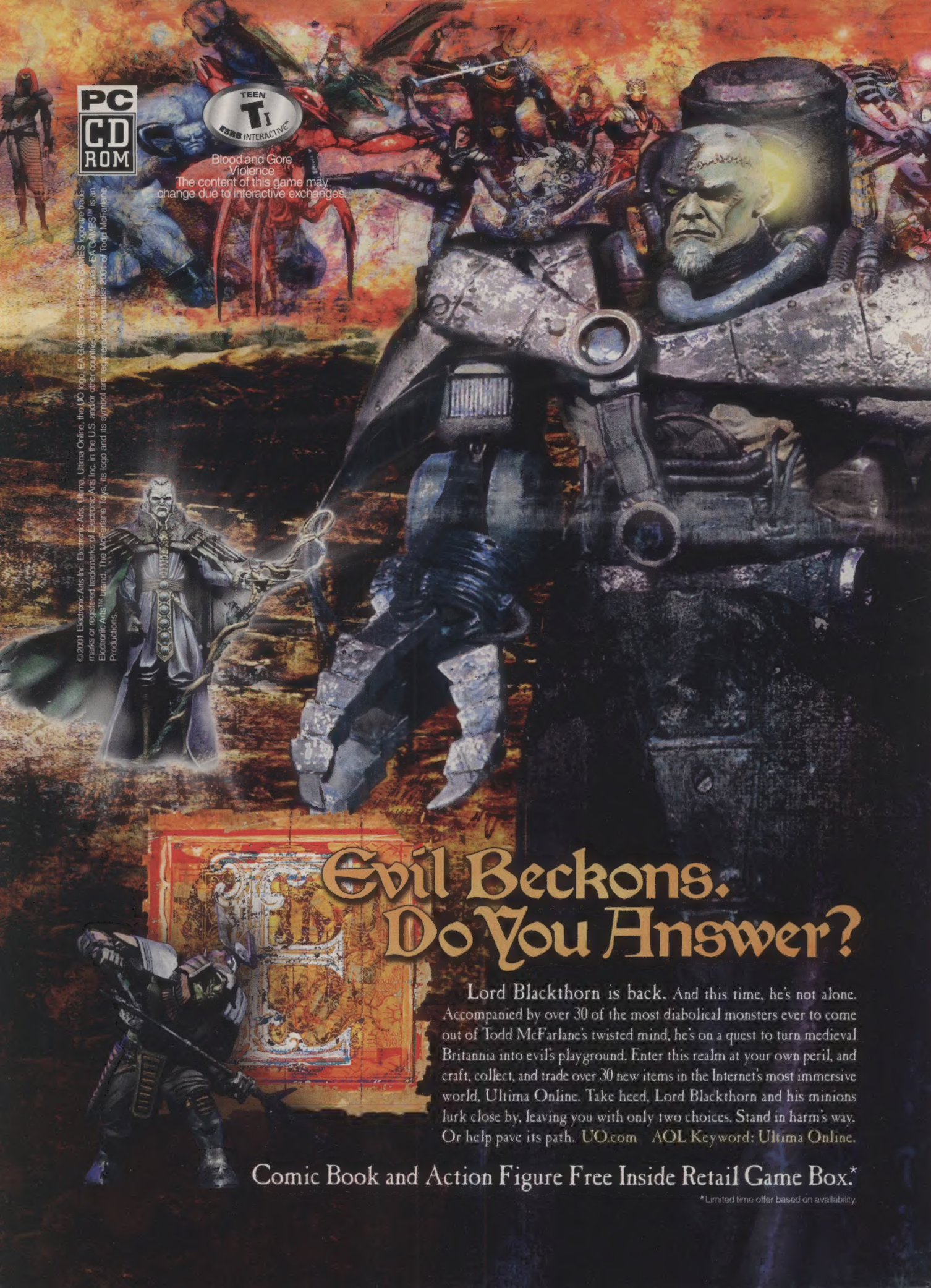
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ROM
TEEN
T
ESRB INTERACTIVE
Blood and Gore
Violence
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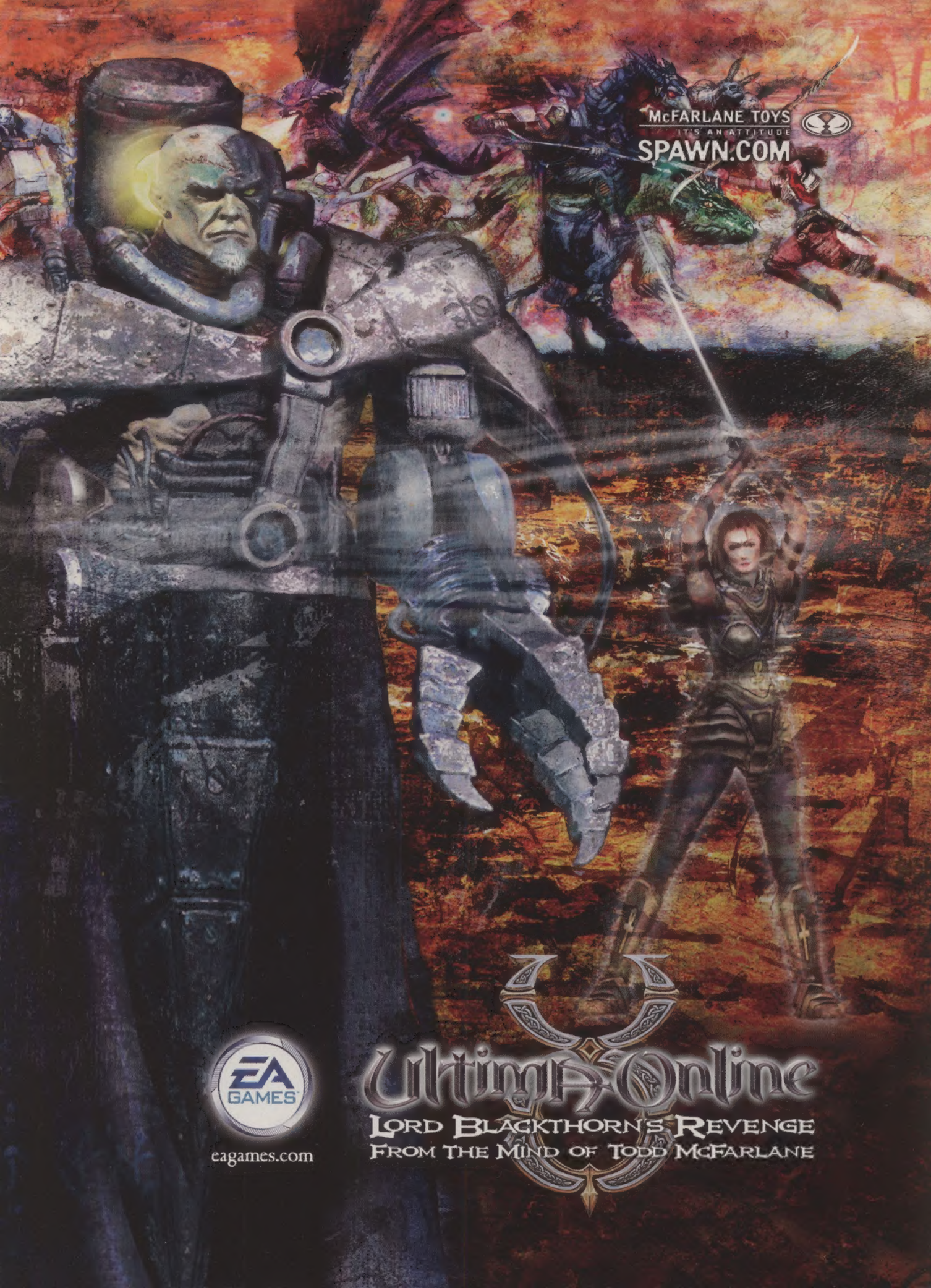
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FROM THE MIND OF TODD McFARLANE

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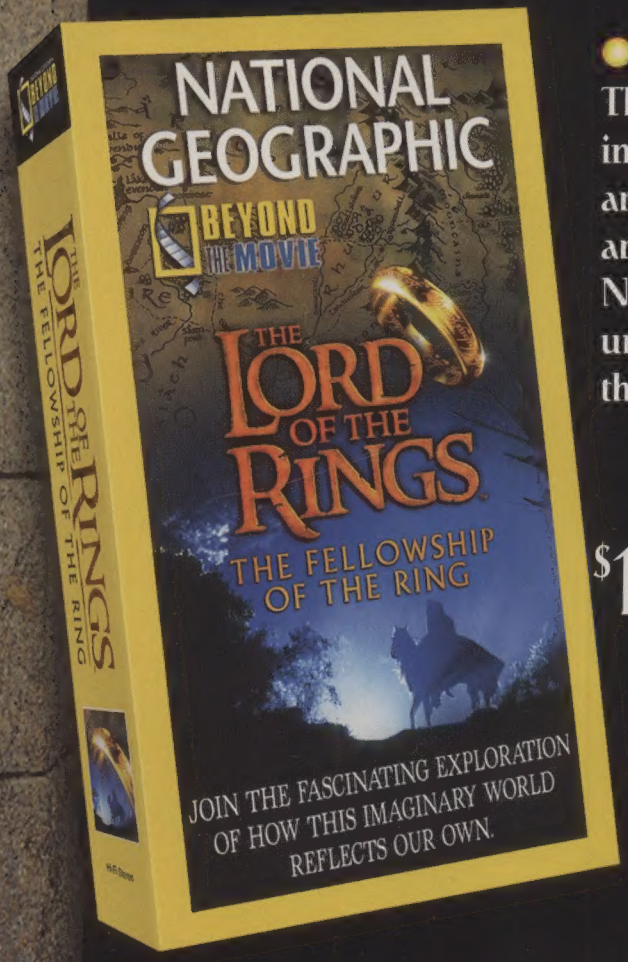
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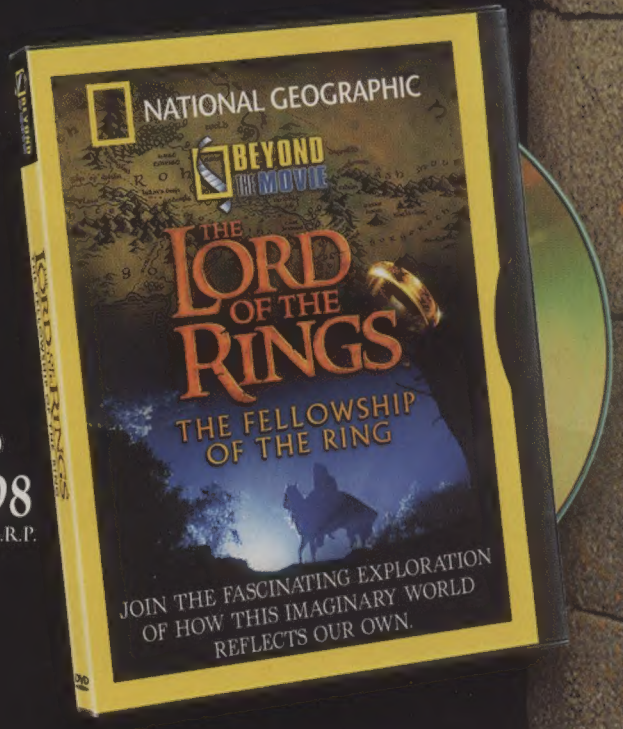
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editorial

No more manuscripts, no more books, no more dirty looks

"Heard Rebecca McCabe quit and something about missing manuscripts ..." the letter began. It was an inquiry regarding the status of a story. Made it sound like I had run off into the dark of the night with a briefcase of stolen stories and maybe a plan to begin a covert fantasy magazine.

So all rumors aside, yes I have left the magazine after being Shawna's assistant for some eight years. And certainly not without regret. It was a huge leap of faith those (many) years ago when Shawna hired me to read manuscripts after a mutual acquaintance mentioned I had an English degree from the University of Maine. At the time I had very little experience with the fantasy field and was more inclined to mystery. This meant that names that rang a bell with Shawna were virtually all "John Smiths" to me. So you all had an equal chance of being "discovered" and published. In fact, early on, most of the angry letters to the editor were people who felt they were important writers (and probably some of them were) who were not being treated any differently from the overall masses. So to this day I take special exception to those of you who write in to accuse us of passing over your piece because you are not a well-known author.

However, the naked truth is that quite a few of our rejected manuscripts are rejected because the person who wrote the story is not an author (as yet anyway) and the piece is not a story. Stories take work, hard work. And perhaps a muse. All muses aside, your computer is *not* one. A computer might make a manuscript look pretty, but it cannot write a story for you. What matters most when that first reader is giving your story a firm but quick look see? The words matter. They are always the first thing I look for in a freshly opened tale. What does that mean, you ask? Everyone uses words to tell a story. Some writers even use the same words. But a true writer can wield a sentence like one of our fantasy heroes wields a trusty sword. Writers are artists, creators, painters of mind pictures, skilled at the sound and texture and taste of a word. So although something as mundane as spelling matters, you must not lose sight of the fact that you need to master the importance, structure, and beautiful power of the written word if you are going to create a story for us.

Any of you who have sent us a piece in the past eight years (and perhaps have actually received it back by this issue) should know that your story was well considered. Probably what is most painful to those (of us) on the receiving end of rejection slips is that we realize someone has judged our work to be unworthy or perhaps (worse) failed to notice its blinding greatness. You may "shoot the messenger" if you feel so inclined, but the reality is that an editor was *honest* with you. I think, at the heart of every editor is a streak of stubborn honesty. Your story does not work, it is not for us. Try again.

When I was in college I attended a mandatory sex-ed class for all incoming freshman. Our professor was disabled and walked with two leg braces. He sucked as a sex-ed teacher. I had, in fact, entered the class thinking it was an innovative way to prevent 18- and 19-year-olds from making some major mistakes. This was rural Maine and I was from "more sophisticated" Providence, R.I. The teacher refused to discuss birth control devices, blushed when he had to say anything remotely sexual, and the raciest lesson included "how to ask a girl out on a date." At the end of the session, he asked us to give him a grade. I gave him a "C" which was more than he deserved. He received 15 A's overall and one "C." He wanted to know what the person who gave him a "C" had against him. One of my classmates told me I was "cruel" to give a disabled individual a lousy grade. Frankly, this refusal to coddle people for whatever reason is one of my character strengths and is what made me a good first reader and a good assistant editor for *Realms*. I have never had any qualms about rejecting a story because I felt the writer should be protected from pain. It is the responsibility of anyone wishing to be a writer to accept that rejections happen. Blame the editor, the P.O., or whomever all you want—but if you cannot handle rejection, you are not ready to be a writer.

My understanding of the origin of the word "scapegoat" is a goat upon which the sins of the people are symbolically placed after which he is sent into the wilderness—taking the sins along. A rather lofty and inappropriate analogy for a mere departing assistant and some rejected manuscripts ... but feel free to use me as your scapegoat for the fact that any story was rejected in the past eight years. And sorry about all those missing manuscripts. Really!

Rebecca McCabe

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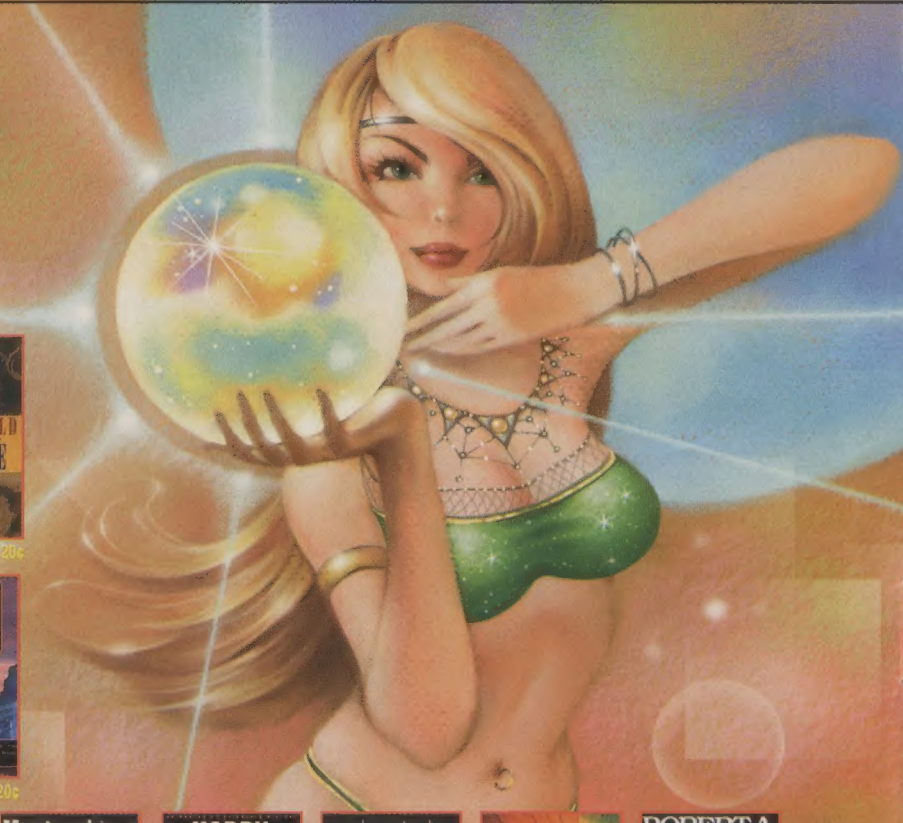

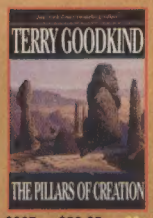

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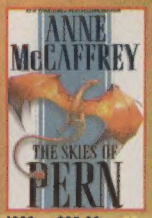

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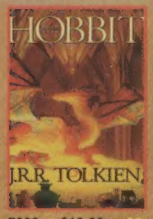

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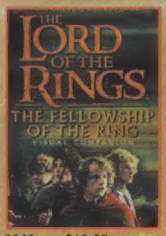

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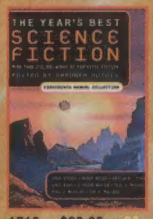

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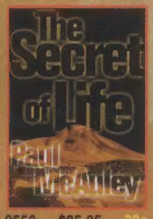

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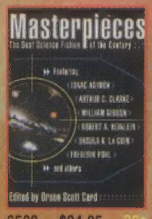

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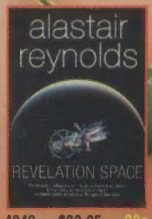

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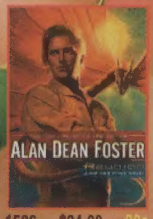

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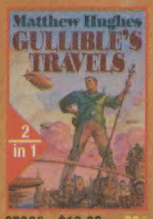

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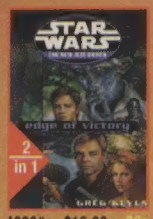

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Dear Ms. McCarthy:

I am a longtime reader of *Realms of Fantasy* and must compliment your editorial in the February 2002 issue. I am an EMS worker who was deployed to the EMS staging area of Ground Zero. My heart dropped in my chest as the NYC skyline came into view after the telltale plumes of black smoke had already encompassed the surrounding sky. In all the fantasy novels I have read, with visions of destroyed villages and kingdoms, I was confronted with an image that I could only describe as a city that had suffered the attack of a flight of Dragons. Yet in my heart I knew this was all reality and not one of the many fantastical worlds of which I have read. It brought into perspective that the "Dragons" that had caused this destruction, as well as the sinister plans to execute such destruction, were man-made.

It became clear, as I watched another building collapse in the NYC skyline and listened to fellow ambulances being dispatched to transport the bodies of hundreds of fallen brothers and sisters—only to realize that there were thousands more beneath the burning rubble of the World Trade Center—that two key factors of every fantasy novel were as real as you and I. Good and Evil existed on September 11, 2001 in their purest form. We watched as Evil possessed our fellow man to unleash such an attack on unsuspecting people and we watched as a country united to help her fallen brothers and sisters. There was no distinction of race, religion, or social status on September 11. Americans everywhere united in an unprecedented way that has not been seen since our nation's own revolution and birth. Yet not only did Americans unite but a majority of nations throughout the world rallied to offer assistance to our great nation. Former enemies swore themselves as allies in our quest to vanquish this Evil that had so viciously attacked the heart of freedom.

I was reminded greatly of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* as a new fellowship formed with the nations of the world to vanquish an Evil that spawned from the Middle East. Much like marching into Mordor our united armies are now seeking out and destroying every bit of this Evil. Much like in many fantasy novels, mankind was reminded that Evil is still a very real force in our world; of course, in turn, Good is a relentless force in our world and will overcome Evil once again.

September 11, 2001 will be remembered not only as a day of Infamy but as a day of Evil's biggest strategic flaw. The attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon may have taken lives, but in turn they strengthened spirits and united the world like never before. Now Evil will feel the awakened wrath of the human spirit and Evil will fall once more.

I agree with you wholeheartedly, Shawna, that reading fantasy has now taken on a new meaning for me. It is more personal now. The struggles of the characters to overcome evil in each story have a much more personal feel. Perhaps each of us affected by the tragedy of 9/11 can find comfort in the resolve of characters in fantasy fiction because that resolve is real and it exists in every hero and victim of the September 11 attacks. The heroes of fantasy stories triumph over Evil and so shall we for, as Americans, we will not rest until we do.

Sincerely,
Shane P. Carr
EMT-D

Thanks, Mr. Carr. I'm glad I was able to put some words to the feelings I had during that awful time. Without people like you and the other heroes working day and night at Ground Zero, those days would have been far darker.

Apology

Dear *Realms* readers:

As most of you know, we had a major computer glitch in the February 2002 issue. Two of the stories were missing their last lines. The lines were there when we sent the issue to the printer, but mysteriously disappeared in the printed copies. Although it doesn't make up for our error, here are the last lines of the two stories:

"The Burning Man": "His hand touched hers, and the flame licked the ice, quenched."

"Magic 101": "Memory is a funny thing. If my memory is faulty, how would I know?"

We apologize to you, our readers, and to authors Paul Melko and Brian Plante. We'll redouble our efforts to make sure this never happens again.

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I would wager dollars to doughnuts that you do not read even the first page of any manuscript unless it's submitted by an agent in your personal clique, who has also phoned you in advance to advise you of its stellar quality!

You were not responsible enough nor courteous enough to return my first unread submission, even though more than ample first class return postage had been provided with the SASE envelope which was large enough to carry my manuscript

The American literary taste, talent, culture and publishing industry has been in the toilet for many years.

I would also venture a guess that those duped, mental invalids who shell out their hard-earned money for a subscription to your *Realms of Fantasy* publication, upon receipt of their first issue consign it and all subsequent issues to their toilets, but only after utilization of the pages to perform a hygienic function!

Your blue rejection slip, hubristic, offensive and grossly misleading; it implies that someone actually read the first page or two!

How pathetic!

Sincerely,
Harry S. Harvey Jr.
Boca Raton, FL

Well, Mr. Harvey, I am compelled to reply to your letter on two counts. First, you are correct in stating I do not personally read each page of each manuscript received here at Realms*; however, my assistant does. She is not terribly familiar with agents, cliques, and so forth. In fact, I have received calls from agents quite OPPOSITE in nature from what you are suggesting—namely, that she tends to ignore agents and cliques to a degree that puts all writers new and established on equal footing. We all have an affection for first-time writers, but she is especially devoted to finding them! The writers we do publish in* Realms *are a talented and diverse group of storytellers and your letter does them grave injustice. Some of them have been writing for decades; many have been rejected by* Realms *far more frequently than they have been accepted. All of them were published in* Realms *by slogging through the exact same process as you did. That is, send in their stories, wait an ungodly amount of time to be discovered in the enormous slush pile, read through, sent for a second reading with me (if they make it through the first reading) and then, a reply. Anyone published herein worked for it, waited patiently, and wrote a damn good story in the first place. You are lucky to find yourself rejected with the best of them. We only purchase 36-40 stories per year; if we could, we'd buy more. The "blue" rejection is generic and efficient—but certainly not intended to offend.*

Dear *Realms*,

I just finished reading through your December issue, and I was moved to congratulate you. I always expect the magazine's

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arrival with anticipation because it's always a pleasure to read it, both the sections and the fiction. The stories are excellent, and there's always at least one that touches me deeply. In this issue, however, there were FOUR. My most sincere admiration goes to Gene Wolfe, Daniel Abraham, Catherine Wells, and Devon Monk, who beautifully translated mankind's hopes and dreams into their stories. Love, Compassion, Hope, Chivalry, Courage, Transcendence, all these stories take one or more of the highest aspirations of man and give them an emotional, evocative presentation. I cannot even properly express how much these stories have moved me and how much they have done for me. I can only say, to the authors and the magazine, Thank You Very Much for Everything.

Jorge Hernandez

Thanks to you also Jorge for such a nice letter. I agree—the above mentioned authors wrote exceptional stories and we do appreciate that they were submitted to Realms!

Dear Shawna,

I am writing this to the letters page because it is something you may wish to address. I have been trying repeatedly to log on to the scifinow.com Web site (home of *Realms of Fantasy*). I keep receiving the error message "page not found." I know the page exists—I've been there. Has the page been discontinued, or changed its name, or been affected by one of those nasty viruses going around? I love the magazine and the Web site and was just logging on to get a copy of the guidelines for submission, which I had seen there on an earlier visit.

Ann Franchi
Lakeland, FL

The scifinow.com Web site has been dismantled. The site was shared by Realms *and* SCI FI, *the official magazine of the SCI FI Channel. We are in the process of developing a new site for Realms and we'll let you know when it is up and running.*

Dear Shawna:

The December 2001 issue was the best you have ever done! I read it cover to cover and enjoyed everything thoroughly. I thought the Fall TV Preview article was really informative and I have started watching two of the shows mentioned; I especially like *Mutant X,* which I might not have known about without *Realms.* I am a big fan of "modern" fantasy, as opposed to the dragons and fair maidens type, so I was very impressed with M. Shayne Bell's "If on a Moonlit Night" and Devon Monk's "Last Tour of Duty." I am looking forward to more stories by these writers so I hope you will publish them again soon. And I also loved all of the artwork that accompanies the stories. It's amazing how well the illustrations convey the essences of the stories. I am in art school now and I aspire to be published in a magazine like yours. Thanks for the great work.

Lila Willson
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Thank you Lila. You will definitely see stories by M. Shayne Bell and Devon Monk in the pages of Realms *in the near future. And good luck in art school!*

Dear *Realms:*

I hate to keep complaining about this, but more often than not I receive only part of an issue of *Realms*. Sometimes only the cover arrrives! I'm sure the damage occurs while the magazine is going through the mail, but it is really upsetting when I don't receive the full issue. I know you print with protective covers most of the time, but they do not prevent this kind of damage. Is there anything you can do about this? I have called your offices in the past and the staff person did mail me a new copy, which I appreciated, but I wish the Post Office would be kinder to the magazine!

Julie Gerrity
Woodstock, Vermont

Your letters are welcome. Send them to: Letters to the Editor, Realms of Fantasy, *P.O. Box 527, Rumson, NJ 07760. Or better yet, e-mail to: realmsoffantasy@aol.com*

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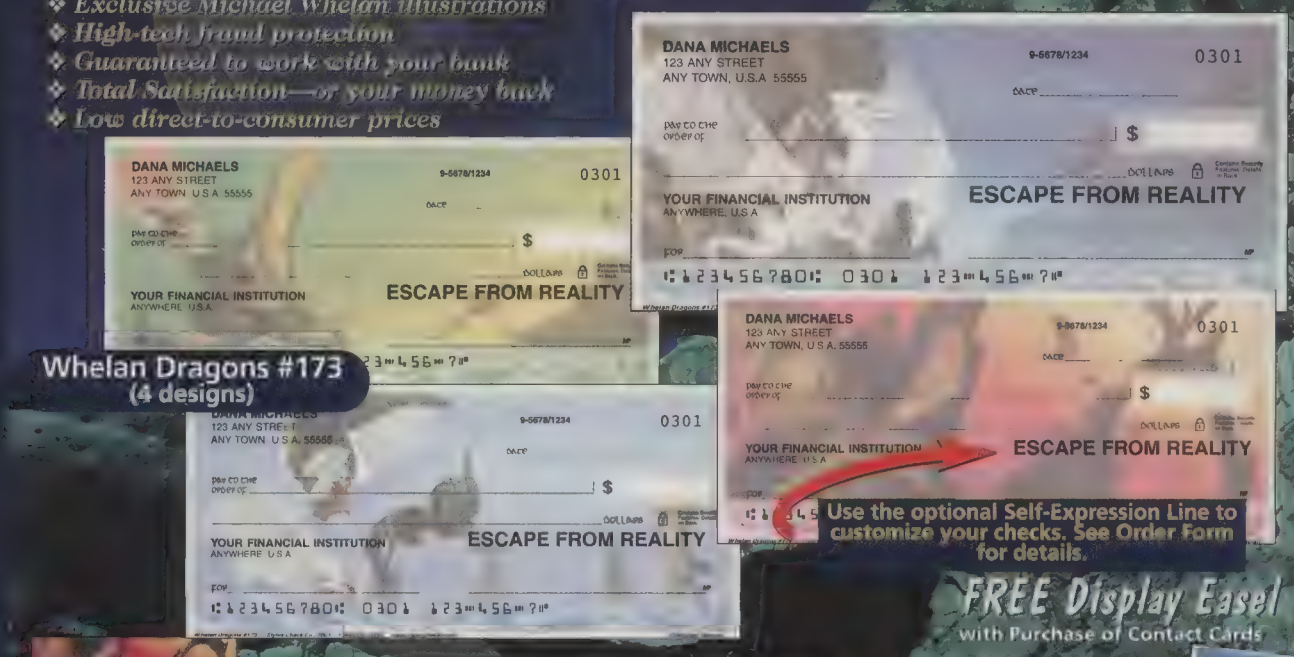

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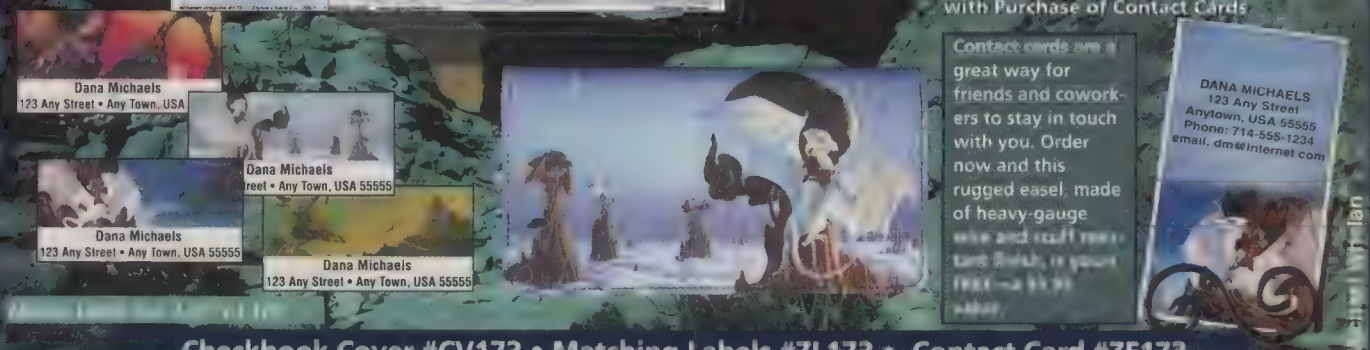

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By Ari Berk, Ph.D.

A rune with a view—an introduction to the visionary alphabet of the northern world.

© 1996 by Maryclare Foa

Odin pierces himself in the side and hangs from a tree for nine nights. A vision comes, he gathers up the runes, and then falls from the tree. The experience gives him knowledge of ancient lore and words.

Those who would read the sacred runes,
given by the gods,
that Odin set down
and the sage stained with color,
are well advised to waste no words.

from, "The Sayings of the High One,"
in *The Poetic Edda*
(translated by Patricia Terry)

It begins with the wind among the branches. That's how it always starts. Something moves in the boughs. Something stirs and shakes and finally drops to the ground and is caught up, carried away, and remembered.

And there was wind.

I was writing when the storm started but soon had to turn off the computer. The storm increased and strong winds shook the trees, and so I set my work aside for the night. Heavy rain buffeted the house and a branch fell to the ground in my mid-Michigan yard. The next morning I found the branch where it had fallen around the boles. Looking at it, I saw it was shaped like a letter of the runic alphabet: *feoh*, the rune for wealth, the first letter. I looked up briefly into the boughs where all the letters danced on the leafless branches, then down to the roots where words twisted below the soil. I picked up the rune and carried it away.

Runes are primal letters. I say "primal" because even though their historical development begins in the 2nd or 3rd century as adaptations of the Roman or Greek alphabet, they are certainly evocative of (if not partially based on) the natural forms found in the forests of ancient Europe. So the shapes of the these letters connect us to the First Forest, and move our minds closer to a time when the patterns of the land could be expressed creatively as signs and symbols, when letters might stand for many things: a sound, an embodiment of place, a spell, a fate.

The name "rune" originates in words meaning "secret" and is applied to letters of various early Northern European alphabets, but "rune" may also mean "a poem, charm, or spell." So when we talk of runes, we are speaking of objects that have multiple meanings, signatures of both sound and symbol. The "secret" may reside not so much in a hidden meaning (though runes have many), but in a way of seeing the world, a way of seeing the secret and sensual sides of language and landscape. In this sense, each single rune creates a palimpsest, a layering of phonetics, poetry, and power built up over time. When inscribed, runes are intended to endure. They record things that must be remembered or heeded. Runes are the letters and words that must not be lost or "wasted." They embody and express the essential knowledges of the Northern tradition.

On my desk is a piece of antler carved with runes. It's a reproduction I've made of the earliest runic inscription carved in England, a small piece of red deer antler found at an Anglo-Saxon settlement in Suffolk. Translated, the inscription reads *wohs wealdum deora/n*, and means *grow/s wild animal.* On the

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surface, the meaning of such an artifact appears simple. It tells the source of the piece of antler: grown on a wild animal. But there may be another story here. As we'll see, runes were often carved as spells or charms, and so we might interpret these runes as a request for the sympathetic power of the red deer that once sported the antlers to increase and bestow its growing strength upon the owner of the charm. It may also be a fetish used in hunting, meant to increase the number of game animals brought into the vicinity of the hunter. So, even the simplest runic text may carry several meanings. In this way, runes—as both letters and charms—remind us of the inherent potential in language and alphabets to exert an individual will on the wider world, to call a desire into being.

Where did people first learn about using runes magically? What are the sources of rune lore? To investigate the mythic and cultural origins of the runes, we must look to the poems of the *Elder Edda*. The *Poetic Edda* is a collection of pre-Christian poems, or lays, originating in Greenland, Iceland, and Norway sometime between the 9th and early 13th centuries. Patricia Terry's, *Poems of the Elder Edda* is superbly poetic, and I have adapted my translations largely from this version. The poems of the *Edda* were collected and compiled in a manuscript called the *Codex Regius* around 1270 AD. Much more than merely entertaining stories, the *Edda* poems are true mythology, singing the origins of the Northern world to life. Here are runes and riddles, songs and spells, chants and charms. The lays are filled with prophecy and practical instructions, ranging from the laws of hospitality to spells for dispersing "hag-riders."

The story of the runes begins in the boughs, in the *Havamal*, or "The Sayings of the High One." One of the first poems in the *Edda*, it tells the story of Odin's ritual sacrifice "of himself to himself," his quest for knowledge, and his finding the runes. This god—who is variably called the All-Father, Grimnir (The Masked One—for often, like the runes, he shrouds himself in mystery), and a hundred other names—pierces himself in the side with a spear and hangs for nine nights in a windswept tree. He does not eat or drink. Then the vision comes and he reaches down, catching up the runes, finally falling from the tree. "Thus," he says,

I grew wealthy in the ancient lore,
became rich in wisdom
Brought forth words from the words I found,
verses springing up where I sought them.

Odin's experiences are decidedly shamanistic. Without food, he seeks a vision, an otherworldly experience that will convey poetic and oracular power. It's important to remember that unlike other gods of literacy (the celtic Ogma, for example), Odin didn't *make* the runes, he *found* them: a strong statement about the ability to quest and to look to the natural world for inspiration. In finding the runes, Odin becomes the master of letters, the god of prophecy, but also the god of death and the gallows. These seemingly disparate associations support the belief that knowledge won through vision is always in part ancestral, always somehow related to both the gods, the land, and the dead. Odin's title, "the High One," refers not only to his position as head of the Norse pantheon, but also his hard-won perspective, hanging as a sacrifice from the tree boughs. One-eyed, he sees into both this world and the Other, into the lands of both the living and the dead. As Rune-winner, he becomes the god of magic because he can both create power and make it permanent (and therefore transferable to others) through the use of letters.

The *Havamal* includes a recitation of the wisdom Odin won, questioning and advising the reader/listener on the necessary skills of rune-craft:

You will find the runes
and learn to read them in the proper manner,
strong spells
mighty charms
written by the wise
made by the old gods
Odin's hard-won wisdom.
Can you write them? Read them?
Can you paint them? Prove them?
Know you how to wish? How to worship?
How to summon? How to sacrifice?

It's clear from the *Havamal* that the runes are not merely letters, but essential and intricate parts of a highly poetic and magical system of knowledge. Most importantly, such learning was not only the provenance of the gods, but of clever mortals as well; runic knowledge was something that could be mastered and passed down. The text continues by giving a mysterious list of the kinds of runes gained by or known to Odin. These seem to allude to various types of spells that people might aspire to learn for themselves, including runes for healing, binding, dispersing "hag-riders," protecting, reviving the dead, and blessing. It is unclear whether or not these runes are referring to single signs or letters, or to longer inscriptions where runes are used in combination to spell out verbal charms. This list encourages us to remember that letters and words can be used to shape and direct power. In the ancient Northern world, then, language and letters are not passive, but deliberate invocational constructions that request, encourage, invite, or compel the chaotic world to bend toward human desires.

Runes were a way of exerting control over monumental, cthonic forces, and as such, their carvers often called upon powers as terrible as the creatures they were meant to threaten

ABOVE: Staffs engraved with Gothic characters had magical power in Northern European stories. LEFT: Magician Holler rides his rune-bone boat across the seas. Both engravings are from Olaus Magnus's 16th-century Descriptions of the Northern Peoples.

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The earliest runic inscription, grow/s wild animal, *was found in England.*

or destroy. Throughout the lays, the power of runes was both respected and feared. Good characters could carve frightening runes, and even giants (for the *Edda* is rife with them) trembled at the power of such spells. In the story of "Skirnir's Journey," a giantess named Gerd is compelled to give her favors to Frey, son of Njord, the old Vanir sea god.

The story opens with a heartsick Frey. His parents send Skirnir, a servant, to enquire about Frey's melancholy. Skirnir goes swiftly to the giant's land to win Gerd for Frey. He woos in kind terms first, offering her golden apples and rings of gold. These and more she refuses. Then Skirnir threatens her with a rune-carved sword, starvation, imprisonment, and the wrath of Odin and Thor. But it's not until he threatens her by saying,

I have carved for you a Troll-rune and three others besides:
lust and lewdness and frenzy,
but each one will be erased
if the need for them is gone.

Only then does Gerd call Frey a "fair youth," filling a cup with mead for him. Only after the most dreaded runes are carved does she submit to the less than romantic words of Skirnir and turn her heart to consider the young son of the Vanir.

Even when no written letters of the runic alphabet are specifically described, certain charms and songs may still be referred to as "runes," an indication of their continuing connection with earlier, simpler forms of verbal magic and symbolic poetry. This kind of song was particularly popular in medieval Finnish sagas. In these stories, eldritch knowledge was hoarded and preserved in rune-songs; in songs and stories the most clever people gained their prowess, becoming masters of memory and verbal performance. Perhaps the most famous of such people was the fabled Vainamoinen of the *Kalevala.* In Keith Bosley's epic translation (Oxford Press) we learn of Vainamoinen: part hero, part creative god, a song-master and poet of great power and intelligence. In the *Kalevala,* the story of "The Singing Match" opens with Vainamoinen practicing his craft:

He sang day by day,
night by night he recited
ancient memories
those deep origins which not all the children sing
only fellows understand
in this evil age, with time running out.

Later in the story, he battles Joukahainen, a young and promising (though arrogant) aspirant to Vainamoinen's title as song-master. What's particularly interesting about this account is the incident that begins the battle of words: Joukahainen will not step aside on the road and give Vainamoinen the respect owed his age and position. Here we see that tradition and rune-lore are the special province of the old, and that wisdom is to be won by living life correctly, by respecting the sources of knowledge. After bantering words for a time, Vainamoinen finally loses his patience with the rude young man and begins to utter rune-songs of terrible power:

... the lakes rippled, the earth shook
the copper mountains trembled
the sturdy boulders rumbled
the cliffs flew in two
the rocks cracked upon the shore.

Vainamoinen sang at Joukahainen, chanting:

saplings on his collar-bow
a willow shrub on his hames...
sang his blaze-browed horse
to rocks on a rapid's bank...
He sang him in a swamp up to his waist
in a meadow to his groin
in the heath up to his armpits.

While they may seem excessive, Vainamoinen's punishments serve as reminders to both Joukahainen and the reader: Do not overstep your position, remember the earth and your relationship to it, do not rise too high in your estimation of yourself. Vainamoinen's spells use words of stopping and binding, and so caution us about the perils of moving too quickly in life or in learning. Wit and wisdom, Vainamoinen might tell us, are slowly won through watching both the world and the wise.

But not all references to runes are to be found in medieval myths and song-poems; they become the stuff of chronicle and ethnography as well. Later writers of the 16th century made reference to rune-using people to add wonder and a sense of "otherness" to their descriptions of "primitive" cultures. Olaus Magnus, in his massive ethnography, *A Description of the Northern Peoples* (published originally in 1555 and more recently by the Hakluyt Society, edited by P.G. Foote in 1996), includes rare and fascinating insight into the use of runes among people living on the edges of Northern Europe.

Often legendary, these accounts include numerous references to magic and folklore. In such texts, runes found on ancient stones told of the time of giants in certain regions, while other inscriptions recorded stories and epitaphs of clever heroes and magicians, carrying their reputations forward through time. In his chapter on the "alphabet of the Goths," Magnus writes:

From a primeval age, when there were giants in the northern lands, long, that is, before the Latin letters were invented ... the kingdoms of the North had a script of their own. Evidence of this is furnished by stones of extraordinary size attached to the tombs and caverns of the ancients. If anyone doubts that this was accomplished by the strength of giants in very early times, let him go there and see greater and more staggering wonders than any piece of writing could promise or provide.

And later he speaks of memorial stones:

Their sites were wonderful, their arrangements even more so, but most wonderful of all are the inscriptions. They have been put there for a variety of reasons: when the stones are marked with letters [runes] and put in a long, straight line, they mark the contests of champions; square stones show the fights of cavalry squadrons; rounded ones indicate the burial of near kinsmen.

He records the use of staves, long flat pieces of wood carved with runes:

From these engraved sticks we can perceive the implements with which, in very ancient times before books were in use, they found with unfailing success the properties and influences of the moon, the sun, and other heavenly bodies.

These staves were likely not carved with lengthy texts, but with runic tables representing the planets and their associations; not stories then, but small and enduring marks that stood for all the motions of the heavens and the earth.

Even in Magnus's time, on the borders of Northern Europe, people existed who still used runes, or who remembered those who did in song and story. These people, known to us through Magnus's chronicles, still venerated the ancient songs and wove the old magic up from the ancestral ground. For these rune-wise peo-

Recommended Reading

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R.I. Page, *Reading the Runes* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1987).

Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, *Egil's Saga* (New York: Penguin, 1976).

Nigel Pennick, *The Secret Lore of Runes and other Ancient Alphabets* (London: Rider, 1991).

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Patricia Terry (translator), *Poems of the Elder Edda* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

ple, myth and history blended together. Following suit, Magnus makes little distinction between myth and history in his chronicle. For most of recorded history, legends occupied the frontier between myth and history—that place where people might decide for themselves what was true and what wasn't. Most often, "truth" was awarded to the story best told, and a fine telling carried its own authority. Magnus revels in such legends, many of which feature the power of runes as both memorials and as magical signs. One tells of a wizard named Gilbert who by means of magic was bound fast by Kettil, his master, for his insolence. Magnus tells how it was done:

A small staff, engraved with certain Gothic characters was thrown towards him by his master and when Gilbert caught it in his hands he remained fettered and unable to move. Nor could he free himself when he applied his teeth to it, for it was as if they were stuck together with an adhesive pitch....

The wizard Gilbert may still be found in a deep cavern below an island on Lake Vattern. Those runes not only hold the wizard in the earth, but also bind a story in memory to a particular landscape.

Another legend tells of a magician of the North named Holler. Very grand was this wizard and skilled in rune-craft. While a fascinating account on its own, this story also harbors at its heart a metaphor regarding the nature of language itself. Magnus relates that the wizard Holler

attained a grandeur among the gods equal to that of Odin and achieved such fame in his use of weapons and conjuring that instead of a ship to cross the seas, he employed a bone, which he had engraved with fearful spells, and on this he skimmed over the waters in his path as speedily as he could have done with wind-filled sails.

Like Holler's rune-bone "boat," stories are great travelers too, and so are letters. They change over time and by the handling of many people. Simultaneously they reflect the beliefs of particular cultures while maintaining ideological connections with their long journeys. So when the runes arrived in Britain with the Saxons, they retained something of their magical Northern origins. In the Anglo-Saxon rune poem (other versions exist from Iceland and Norway), we see the nature of the runes still expressed as associative and perhaps divinatory signs, but in the metaphors of another, newer land.

The Anglo-Saxon rune poem was recorded around the 9th century and provides a compact expression of runic lore in poetic form. The allusions are, for the most part, pre-Christian, but in some cases may contain Christian connections as well, a frequent result of a Christian scribe's involvement with non-Christian texts. Much of what we currently know about the runes and how they function as ideograms (letters or signs that symbolically represent abstract concepts) comes from these early poems. Each part of the poem records

Continued on page 95

Poems of the Runic Alphabet

WEALTH (*feoh*) brings great ease to every person, though each must grant it freely to get honor and a good name before God.

AUROCH (*ur*) is high-horned, fierce, and proud. Moor-stomper, it wanders wild among the wastes, a creature of battle.

THORN is always sharp and will cause grievous pain to those who grip it, worse still for those who rest within its reach.

The **MOUTH** (*os*) is the origin of all words, a source of nobility and steadfast in wisdom.

RIDING (*rad*) is gladsome to the waiting warrior in the hall, but a strain for him who rides long roads on the back of a strong horse.

The **TORCH** (*cen*) is known to all living men; a small bright flame always burning where nobility gathers.

A **GIFT** (*gyfu*) garners honor and fame, and a good life to those who give and get them. It is help and happiness to those with nothing.

JOY (*wynn*) is known to those who acknowledge neither sorrow nor suffering. With it, every house prospers and knows its share of happiness.

HAIL (*haegl*) is whitest of grains. Heaven tossed and fast falling, it is hurled by winds and soon returns to water.

NEED (*nyd*) is heavy to the heart, yet may help those who heed its warnings in time.

ICE (*is*) is cold and terribly slippery. It is sparkling gems, glistening like glass. It is the frost-wrought floor and full fair to gaze upon.

SEASON (*gera*) is a joy to all, a summer of the soul, when the earth brings forth bright fruits for all under heaven.

YEW (*eoh*) is a tree with rough bark, earth-fast and root-sure, a guardian of the flame. Gladness attends its growth about the home.

PEORTH (perhaps a dice-cup) is amusement, fun, and fate where warriors and wives gather gladly in the mead hall together.

ELK-SEDGE (*eolhx*) is water bound, a guardian of the fens and marshes. Blood soon attends the hands that touch it, ghastly wounds are given freely from its stalks.

The **SUN** (*sigel*) is the friend of seafarers when they ride their horses of the deep over the fishes' bath and back again to land.

TIR (the god Tiw) is guide-mark, trust-sure, faithful friend to all. He keeps a steady course by night, through mist, and will not fail.

BIRCH (*beorc*) bears no fruit, yet seedless sends forth shoots. Bright branches and lovely leaves, its boughs greet the sky.

The **HORSE** (*eh*), prance-proud and fleet of hoof, is the delight of princes when in the warrior's company. A swift steed is comfort when men are restless and mix words amongst themselves.

MAN (*mann*), when merry about his business, is a joy to his kinsman, yet will each in his time fail his fellows and return again to the ground.

WATER (*lagu*) is a fright to men who journey across the deep on rolling ships when the water crests and crashes and their wave-steeds will not heed their bridles.

ING (a foreign god) was known to the Danes until he followed the sea-road eastwards with his chariot behind him.

The **ANCESTRAL HOME** (*ethel*) is most dear to everyone if they may enjoy in that estate all things right and proper in perpetual prosperity.

DAY (*daeg*), dearly loved by all, is heaven's messenger, the Creator's light; source of happiness and hope. It is friend and comfort to rich and poor alike.

Runes © 2001 by Ari Berk

By Resa Nelson

The Top 10 high fantasy movies are full of swords, sorcery, magic, and more.

High fantasy is a matter of swords and sorcery, of magic and mayhem. High fantasy stories often take place hundreds or thousands of years ago, long before the days of Newton and Einstein. High fantasy can take place on other planets, but those worlds are usually far more mysterious and enchanted than our own.

Ironically, recent advances in special effects technology, especially CGI (computer-generated images), are making fantasy more realistic both on television and in the movie houses. This column takes a look at the top 10 high fantasy movies made prior to movies like *Lord of the Rings*.

It's no accident that almost all of the movies on this list were released in the 1980s. The first *Star Wars* movie was released in 1977. Its worldwide success inspired filmmakers to delve into the depths of fantasy in search of similar success. Some of the following movies were fairly successful at the box office, some have become video favorites, and others seem to be nearly forgotten.

Dragonslayer (1981) is the darkest and most realistic film ever made about dragons and dragonslayers. The story begins when a delegation from a nearby town asks an aging sorcerer to battle their dragon. At every spring and autumn equinox, the king conducts a lottery to select a virgin to sacrifice to the dragon. In return, the dragon leaves the town and their crops in peace.

The dragon escapes from its lair and takes vengeance on the town. Galen is then forced to battle it face to face in Dragonslayer.

But then a man suddenly appears to challenge the sorcerer's ability. The man demands a test. The sorcerer gives the man a dagger, then guides the man to stab and kill him.

Galen, the sorcerer's apprentice (played by Peter MacNicol of TV's *Ally McBeal* and *Roswell*), discovers that he has inherited the sorcerer's powers. It's now up to Galen to face and battle the dragon.

Galen makes a valiant attempt to block the only entrance to the dragon's lair while the dragon is inside. Galen and the town are convinced that he has succeeded, and everyone celebrates. But when the dragon finds its way out, it wreaks vengeance on the town, and the king immediately imprisons Galen, who eventually is freed and goes on to battle the dragon face to face.

Excalibur (1981) is a film based on Arthurian legend that focuses on the sword Excalibur as the beginning and ending of the story. It was directed by John Boorman (*Deliverance, The Emerald Forest*) and stars Nigel Terry (*The Lion in Winter*) as Arthur, Helen Mirren (*Teaching Mrs. Tingle* and TV's *Prime Suspect*) as Morgana, Gabriel Byrne (*End of Days, Stigmata*) as Uther Pendragon, Liam Neeson (*Star Wars: The Phantom Menace, The Haunting*) as Gawain, and even Patrick Stewart (TV's *Star Trek: The Next Generation*) in a small role.

The story begins when the once and future king's father, Uther Pendragon, is frustrated in battle against Cornwall. Uther calls upon Merlin to deliver on his promise of giving Uther a sword that will make him king. At Merlin's command, Excalibur rises through water in the hand of the Lady of the Lake.

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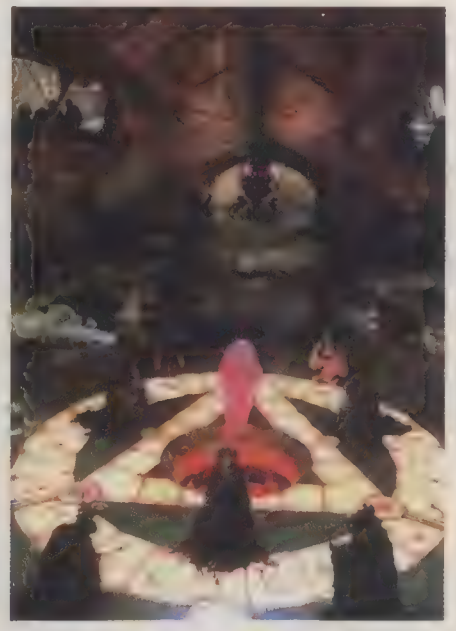
LEFT: Rutger Hauer plays the mysterious Captain Navarre, who turns into a wolf by night, in Ladyhawke.
BELOW: The elaborate world of the Dark Crystal was brought to the screen by Jim Henson and numerous other artists.
BELOW CENTER: Sean Connery plays Connor McLeod's two-thousand-year-old mentor in Highlander.



The sword is said to have been forged at the beginning of time, which is the source of its magical power.

With the help of Excalibur, Uther strikes a deal with Cornwall to share the land. But at the celebration banquet, Uther is struck by the beauty of Igrayne, who is married to one of Cornwall's dukes. Uther becomes obsessed. He pleads with Merlin to help him. Merlin gives Uther the power to ride his horse across the dragon's breath—the fog and mist that Merlin pulls up out of the sea by the duke's castle. Merlin also gives Uther the appearance of Igrayne's husband. But in return, Merlin makes Uther promise that whatever results from his lust for Igrayne will belong to Merlin.

So when Igrayne bears a son, Arthur, Merlin shows up and lays claim to him. *Excalibur* proceeds to tell the rest of the story, from the sword in the stone (we see Uther embed Excalibur in the stone), to Guinevere, to Lancelot, and the quest for the Holy Grail. *Excalibur* is full of magic and vision, and is a must-see for any fan of the Arthurian legend.

The Dark Crystal (1982) is a Jim Henson film that stars nothing but his creatures. But don't mistake *The Dark Crystal* for just another Muppet movie. It's high fantasy in its truest form. Although the story takes place in a fantasy world on another planet, the movie has a lot to say about what it means to be human.

The planet is in ruin because of an event that took place a thousand years ago. There is a gigantic crystal in a dark, twisted castle out in a desert. The crystal is missing a single shard. The planet will not be whole again until that shard is found and rejoined to the crystal. The problem is that the crystal is guarded by the final 10 members of a dying race, the Skeksis, who look like grotesquely mutated vultures.

Elsewhere on the planet are the final 10 members of another dying race, the Mystics, who are wise and kind wizards that look a bit like Afghan hounds.

The hero of the story is Jen, an elf-like Gelfing whose parents were killed by the Skekses. Believing himself to be the last survivor of the Gelfing race, Jen is raised by a Mystic. Jen learns that his destiny is to find the lost shard of the dark crystal before the three suns align and shine as a single sun, an event that happens once every thousand years. If Jen succeeds, something wonderful will happen. But if he fails, the world will move into darkness and the evil Skeksis will rule forever. As Aughra, a sorceress who helps Jen, explains, "It means the end of the world ... or the beginning."

Jen journeys from the safe world he's always known with the Mystics into new territory of strange creatures, danger, and seemingly impossible challenges.

Ladyhawke (1985) is considered by many to be the best fantasy film ever made. It boasts a script that's dramatic, clever, and funny, as well as a stellar cast directed by veteran Richard Donner (*Superman*, *The Omen*, and TV's original *Twilight Zone*).

Ladyhawke begins when a young pickpocket named Phillipe, a k a "the mouse" (played by Matthew Broderick of *Inspector Gadget* and *Godzilla*), narrowly escapes execution by slipping through the sewer system from his jail cell. The story takes place in medieval France, and the bishop of the local town enjoys putting on public executions. In fact, the bishop takes great pride in the fact that, until now, no one has ever escaped his prison—and for that reason, he sends his captain of the guard in cross-country pursuit of Phillipe.

Just as the bishop's guards finally catch up with Phillipe and prepare to behead him, the mysterious Captain Navarre (played by Rutger Hauer of *Blade Runner* and TV's *Merlin*) comes out of nowhere to Phillipe's rescue. When Navarre finds out that Phillipe has actually succeeded in escaping the bishop's prison, he asks for Phillipe's help to sneak back into town. Navarre's quest is to kill the bishop.

As he travels with Navarre, Phillipe notices that strange things are happening. A hawk accompanies Navarre as they ride by day. At night, Navarre warns Phillipe to leave him alone as he sleeps. But each night, Phillipe notices that not only does a beautiful woman, Isabeau (played by Michelle Pfeiffer of *What Lies Beneath* and *Batman Returns*), appear

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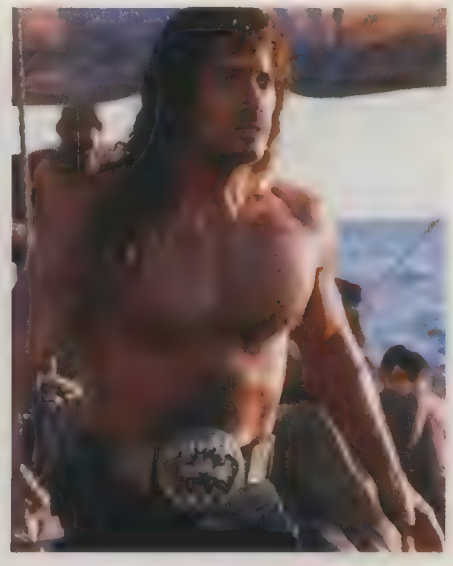

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Robin Wright Penn and Cary Elwes in The Princess Bride. *Kevin Sorbo stars as Kull the Conqueror, a pirate from Atlantis. David Bowie is the well-dressed Goblin King in* Labyrinth. *Julian Sands visits present-day California as a warlock.*

out of nowhere, but there always seems to be a black wolf nearby.

Phillipe comes to discover that Captain Navarre and Isabeau are lovers who have been cursed. When the sun sets, Navarre is transformed into the black wolf, and the hawk becomes Isabeau. When dawn breaks, Isabeau changes back into a hawk, and the wolf becomes Navarre. As Phillipe observes, the two lovers are always together and eternally apart. *Ladyhawke* is the story of how these characters ultimately come together in an effort to break that curse.

Highlander (1986) has one of the most startling opening sequences of any fantasy film. It begins in the modern day as Nash (played by Christopher Lambert of *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan*) sits in the audience at a pro wrestling match. As the crowd whoops and hollers, Nash seems bored. He gets up and leaves. Wearing a long trench coat, Nash walks through the parking garage. A man approaches him from behind. He addresses Nash as if he knows him—and the man draws a sword. Nash draws his own sword, hidden inside his coat.

The men battle it out in the parking garage. The fight ends when Nash decapitates the man and quickly flees the scene.

The police investigate, and a female forensics officer takes a keen interest in the case. She uncovers odd facts about Nash and pursues him.

Highlander flashes back and forth between present day and Scotland in the year 1536 when Nash began his life as Conner MacLeod. He is, in fact, one of a select group of immortals who constantly seek each other out in order to reduce their number to a sole survivor. But the only way to kill an immortal is to behead him, as Nash learns from his mentor, played by Sean Connery (*Finding Forrester, Dragonheart*).

Present and past interweave to tell the story of MacLeod/Nash as the police and his final nemesis close in around him.

Labyrinth (1986) is a Jim Henson film that's well suited for children, but the mere presence of singer David Bowie (*The Man Who Fell to Earth*) is enough to give the film a slightly darker, more adult edge. *Labyrinth* is worth seeing for its imagination and vision. In fact, its climax is based on the drawings of surrealistic artist M.C. Escher.

Jennifer Connelly (*Dark City, The Rocketeer*) plays Sara, a modern-day teenager who whiles her time away pretending to be a princess in a magical land of goblins. Sara has a book named *Labyrinth*, and she recites its dialogue until she knows it by heart.

In her real life, Sara feels put upon by her father, her stepmother, and their baby—Sara's stepbrother, Toby. When Sara's left at home to babysit, she declares that life is unfair and turns to her fantasy world. She pretends that the King of Goblins has fallen in love with her. All she has to do is wish for goblins to kidnap her baby stepbrother, and it will be done. In a weak moment, Sara makes the

wish as she walks away from Toby, leaving him to cry in his crib.

Suddenly, his crying stops.

When Sara goes back to check on him, she discovers that he's missing. The doors fly open, and the Goblin King (played by Bowie) confronts Sara with a challenge. His castle lies at the heart of a great labyrinth—an enormous maze. He transports Sara to the labyrinth, and tells her that if she can get to the castle within 13 hours, she can reclaim Toby. Otherwise, Toby will be turned into a goblin to be kept by the Goblin King.

Sara accepts the challenge, and the adventure begins.

The Princess Bride (1987) is William Goldman's (screenwriter of *The General's Daughter* and *Misery*) adaptation of his own novel by the same name. It begins in the present day when a man (played by Peter Falk of TV's *Columbo*) brings a book named *The Princess Bride* to read to his grandson (played by Fred Savage of TV's *The Wonder Years*), who's sick in bed. The grandfather explains that this is the book that his own father used to read to him whenever he was sick. The boy is resistant and doubtful that listening to his grandfather read is going to be worth his while, even if he is stuck in bed with little else to do. After all, the book is about true love, which the boy considers to be deadly dull.

As the grandfather reads, the story of *The Princess Bride* unfolds on screen. It begins when a farm girl, Buttercup (played by Robin Wright Penn of *Unbreakable* and *Forrest Gump*) and the farm hand Wesley (played by Cary Elwes of *Shadow of the Vampire* and *Liar Liar*) fall in love. The problem is that Wesley has no money for marriage, so he sets off to sea to make his fortune. His ship is accosted by the Dread Pirate Roberts, who's famous for killing everyone he attacks. Buttercup is heartbroken. Five years later, she agrees to marry a prince, despite the fact that she doesn't love him.

In a twist of espionage, Buttercup, now the Princess Bride, is kidnapped by a band of circus performers. This kidnapping is likely to set the prince's country at war with another, for which they set sail. The kidnappers soon realize they're being followed—eventually they find that it's the Dread Pirate Roberts himself. The rest of the story is a mix of sword fights, magic, and an adventure of true love. *The Princess Bride* is funny, charming, and loaded with talent, including actors Billy Crystal, Carol Kane, and Mandy Patinkin, as well as director Rob Reiner and screenwriter William Goldman.

Willow (1988) is classic high fantasy at its best. It boasts some of the finest talent in Hollywood: Ron Howard (*How the Grinch Stole Christmas, Apollo 13*) directs, George Lucas (*Star Wars, Indiana Jones* movies) provides the story and executive produces, and Val Kilmer (*Red Planet, Batman Forever*) stars.

The story begins with a prophecy. A seer predicts the birth of a child who will bring

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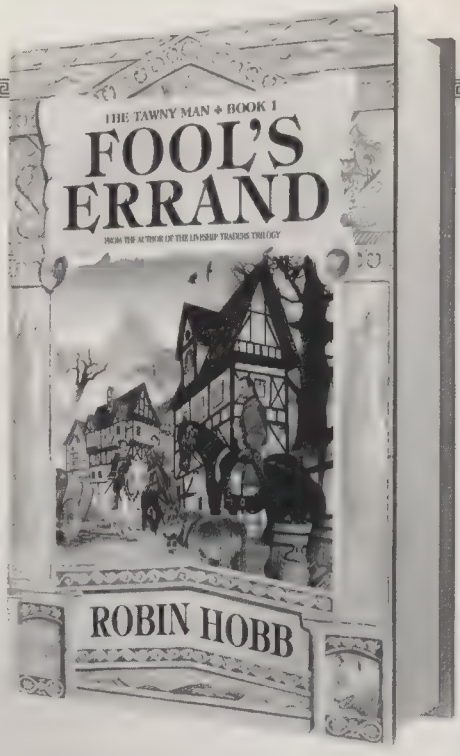

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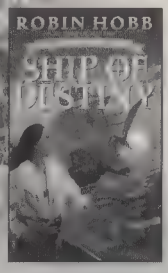

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ABOVE: Willow (Warwick Davis, left) is assigned the job of protecting the baby from evil Queen Bavmorda's henchmen and returning her to her own land. Along the way, Willow joins forces with Madmartigan, a swordsman played by Val Kilmer.
OPPOSITE: Mordred, King Arthur's son and archenemy, is played by Robert Addie in Excalibur.

about the destruction of the evil Queen Bavmorda. The omen claims that a specific birthmark will identify the child. Queen Bavmorda's solution to the problem is to imprison every pregnant woman in her kingdom so that each child can be examined at birth.

Sure enough, a girl is born with the identifying birthmark. As the guards send for Queen Bavmorda, the mother of the newborn pleads with the midwife to save her daughter's life. The midwife smuggles the baby out of the castle and sets her adrift in a basket on a river. Queen Bavmorda kills both the mother and the midwife but fails to find the baby.

The baby eventually drifts to the shore of farmland owned by a family of little people, headed by a man named Willow (played by Warwick Davis of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and TV's *The 10th Kingdom*). The town council assigns Willow the task of taking the baby back to her own land, and the adventure begins.

As Willow journeys, he hooks up with swordsman Madmartigan (played by Kilmer), brownies, fairies, and a great sorceress who has been changed into an animal. All the while, they're pursued by Queen Bavmorda's henchmen, who are determined to capture the baby. *Willow* has a strong story, lots of high fantasy, and plenty of humor.

Warlock (1989) is a gem of a movie that was written by D.T. Twohy—also known as David Twohy—who wrote the screenplays for *G.I. Jane* and *The Fugitive*, and both wrote and directed *Pitch Black* and *The Arrival*.

The story begins in 1691 Boston, during the height of the witch hunts. A warlock (played by Julian Sands of *Boxing Helena* and *Gothic*) is chained and shackled high up in a tower. Town officials encourage the warlock to confess to trafficking with the devil. Otherwise, they tell the warlock, he'll be hanged and his body will be burned over a basket of live cats. Redferne (played by Richard E. Grant of *Bram Stoker's Dracula* and TV's *Scarlet Pimpernel*) has a personal beef with the warlock, who took something precious from him. After con-

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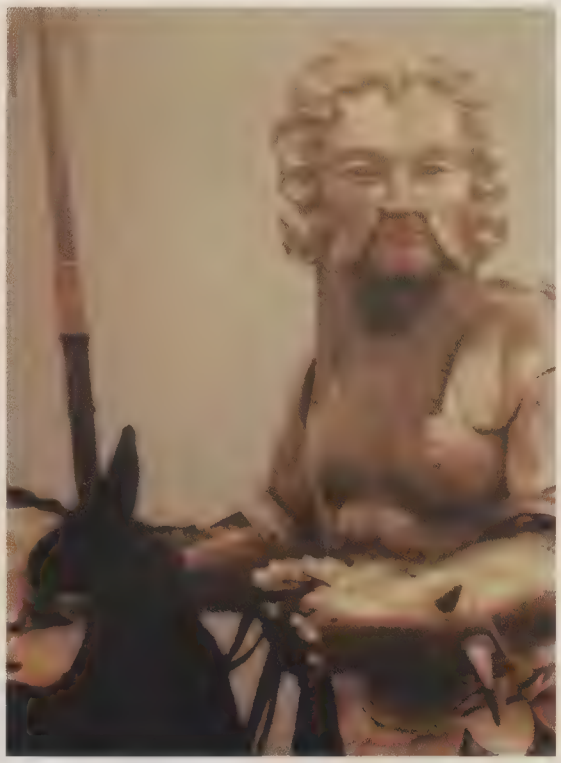
fronting the warlock himself, Redferne sees a sudden storm approaching. On impulse, he checks on the warlock again, only to see him freeing himself from his chains. As the warlock begins to dissolve into thin air, Redferne lunges after him. Then Redferne dissolves as well.

The warlock reappears in present-day California by coming in on a "devil's wind" (a small tornado) and crashing through the living room window of Kassandra (played by Lori Singer of *Footloose* and *Fame*) and her roommate. After wreaking a bit of havoc, the warlock seeks out a spiritualist. Through her, he talks to his father, the devil, who commands the warlock to seek out the three parts of the bible of black magic. Originally secured in a Boston church, the bible was split into three sections centuries ago and scattered across the country for safe keeping. If the warlock succeeds in finding and reuniting the three sections of this unholy book, then he will become the devil's Chosen One.

Redferne arrives at Kassandra's apartment, then sets out to track down the warlock and destroy him. The warlock has placed a quick-aging spell on Kassandra (she ages 20 years every day), so she must go along and confront the warlock in order to reverse the spell.



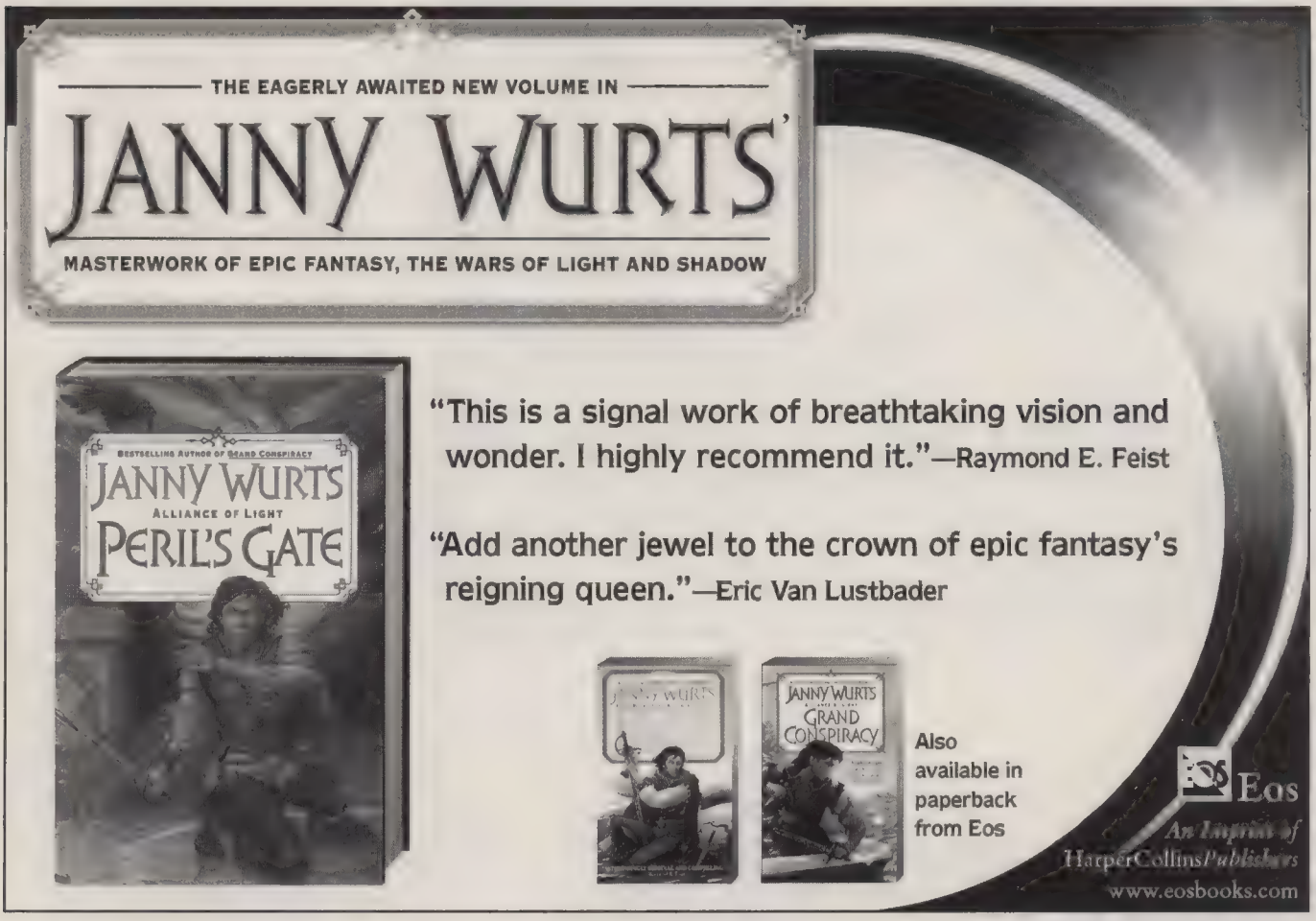
Kull the Conqueror (1997) stars Kevin Sorbo (TV's *Hercules*) and Tia Carrere (TV's *Relic Hunter*) in a story that has the same kind of humor and spirit that Sorbo brought to his career-defining role on television as Hercules.

Kull (played by Sorbo) is a pirate from Atlantis who's landed in the kingdom of Volusia. Before Kull's story begins, we learn that at the dawn of time, demons ruled over men. These demons were led by the Red Witch, Akivasha (played by Carrere). In these ancient times, the god Valka destroyed this evil empire and Akivasha along with it.

When we first meet Kull, he finds himself at the center of a crisis—the king of Volusia has gone mad and killed almost all of his rightful heirs to the throne, with the exception of two cousins. Kull enters the palace to find royal bodies strewn on the floor. He then delivers a fatal blow to the king in self defense. As each cousin tries to wrangle the crown into his own hands, the dying king gives his crown to Kull—and the king's decision is final. Kull becomes the king of Volusia.

Although supportive to Kull's face, the cousins scheme behind his back to regain control of the kingdom. With the help of a wizard, they magically revive the ancient remains of Akivasha into human form. While the cousins plot to use Akivasha to kill Kull, she plots to return Volusia to her own, demonic rule.

The story is based on the characters and worlds created by Robert E. Howard (*Conan the Barbarian*). *Kull the Conqueror* is fast paced, loaded with action, and cleverly written. ❧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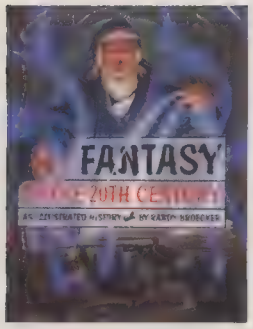
Harry Turtledove is the master of alternate history.



A shining row of sparkling, silvery letters running across the top of the dark yet blood red cover of Harry Turtledove's ***American Empire: Blood & Iron*** (Del Rey, The Ballantine Publishing Group, NYC; hardcover; 503 pp.; $27.95) boldly reads: THE MASTER OF ALTERNATE HISTORY, and that boast is not a lie.

True, there are others working in the highly intriguing field of what-if? fiction, and some of them have turned out absolutely wonderful novels and short stories, a number of which I have been delighted to praise with great enthusiasm in this column. But, for sustaining a consistently high level of literary quality, for boldness of imagination, range of exploration, brilliant but totally unpainful subliminal education (his books never fail to get you thinking!), and above all for providing grateful readers with hour upon hour of slam-bang, really first-rate entertainment, Harry Turtledove has no real challenger for that title. He has earned it.

N.C. Wyeth is but one of the many fantastic artists included in Fantasy of the 20th Century. *This illustration is on the cover of* Legends of Charlemagne.

American Empire: Blood & Iron is a continuation of a previous trilogy, *The Great War,* which what-iffed World War I in all sorts of ways, the most important to Americans being that as a result of a second war breaking out previously between the North and South, which this time ended with a successful secession, we enter into the fray as two separate nations: the United States and the Confederate States. When the Confederacy ties in with England and France, the USA allies itself with Germany. It is a brilliant and highly startling notion which, like many of Turtledove's notions, will illuminate the reader in all sorts of ways if it is seriously mulled upon.

The Great War ends in a highly uneasy peace with the bulk of Canada occupied by the United States of America and hating it, and the Southern States still intact but desperately damaged and impoverished by the conflict and also hating that same United States. To make matters worse, and thus even more interesting, every variety of racial and political unrest seethes universally and dark maneuvers are plotted in every quarter including a highly plausible scheme to brutally assassinate the now very old but still effectively obnoxious and overbearing General George Armstrong Custer, who was not, in this particular world of Turtledove's, killed by Indians, though, God knows and many of his associates secretly believe, he deserved to be.

The same highly varied and complex cast of characters we met in *The Great War* reappears and carries on in *American Empire* and I found all of them to be as interesting, if not more so, as before. I continue to be just as curious about what will happen to them next and I have more than a sneaking suspicion that, thanks to Turtledove's skillful manipulations, you will be too.

One of these characters turns out to be a real show stealer in *Blood & Iron*. His name's Jake Featherstone and in *The Great War* he was a sergeant in the Confederate States Artillery who bravely, even ruthlessly, commanded a battery of the First Richmond Howitzers in the Army of Northern Virginia. When

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we meet him in *American Empire* he has fallen on very hard times and become a brooding loner in battered Richmond, just barely getting by off odd jobs and as much food as buying a couple of beers permits him to scarf off a saloon's free lunch counter.

Jake is skinny and raw boned and though his day laborer's shirt lacks a collar and his old army pants are raggedy, he is by no means an unimpressive presence. More significantly there is an intensity in his voice when he states his contempt regarding what he sees as the total incompetence of the people presently running the government and the War Department, which tends to convince his listeners, and his ominous warnings concerning what will surely happen if the Blacks join in a red revolution seldom fail to sway.

Jake likes the angry tone of the posters splashed around Richmond touting something called the Freedom Party and likes it even better when he finds it's a tiny group not too well led since he sees that might make it all the easier for him to take it over and use it to pull himself from poverty and place himself in a position of not inconsiderable power.

The story of his rise is extremely well observed and told and has—for me at least—considerably clarified how someone as bizarre and improbable—not to say ridiculous—as, for example, Adolf Hitler manages to bully himself from indigence to appalling heights of authority. Although at the end of the book we leave Jake in a dubious phase of advancement it's clear that his career is, Sauron-like, capable of surviving even severe glitches and that it's very far from over.

I, for one, can hardly wait until book two of *Blood & Iron* tells me more!

In his introduction to ***Nightmare at 20,000 Feet*** by Richard Matheson (Tor Books, NYC; Trade paperback, 336 pp.; $14.95) Stephen King unabashedly confesses the profundity of his debt to Matheson's work, and I think that gratitude can and ought to be sincerely echoed by all of us who labor in the area of fantastic horror for, as King points out, Matheson in his tales (and TV and film scripts and in all sorts of ways) took a lot of trouble to nudge the telling of spooky stories over a number of mossy old Gothic rocks and moldering, leftover skeletons so that he could shove into the newer world in which we then lived. Also, very importantly, he showed it could be done without losing any of the old, reliable ploys and time-tested techniques which imparters of tales of grue have gleefully employed since the old days when scary

stuff was whispered to wide-eyed listeners over fires flickering in dripping caves.

King celebrates how Matheson rejuvenated the whole genre, not neglecting to mention Theodore Sturgeon backing Matheson's efforts in the sci fi field and cannily citing similar refreshers of other arts during that period such as Bruce Springsteen and Elvis Presley, noting they all shared a decided mercilessness. Of Matheson he says: "When you thought it *had* to be over, that your nerves couldn't stand any more, that was when Matheson wouldn't quit."

A proof of the power of Matheson's horrific fantasy notions, such as the one in the title story "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet," is that they have drifted out of the books and magazines in which they first appeared and melded gently into our tribal lore as beloved urban legends. This author has dropped the jaws and bugged the eyes of thousands who have never heard of him and never will, much less actually have read any of his stories, and though I am sorely tempted to start rattling off some core stingers of the more legendary shockers just for the fun of giving you goosebumps, I will refrain, for my job here as I see it is to lure you into the deep enjoyment of coming across these shocks within the stories themselves. Believe me, they're better that way.

One aspect of his mastery is the almost leisurely manner in which so many of these stories glide with seeming effortlessness past the works of so many other authors who up to the present moment have attempted to renovate old forms. "Dress of White Silk," for instance, does more in five and a half pages to bring back the whole fearsomeness of straight-out, no-kidding-around vampires to full, unwholesome flower than any number of reasonably clever novels I've read that have strained to do the same. I just now paused to read it through for God-knows-the-howmanyeth time and the damn thing scared me *again!*

How does the bastard *do* it? Drives me nuts.

One way or another these stories are built like ingenious traps; not simple ones as in a mouse trap where the rodent tugs at a chunk of cheese and—THWANK—is evermore dead of a crushed skull, nothing so simple and so painless on account of swiftness of effect, but rather traps that function by slow, elegant degrees (though you may come to realize that they have fatally gripped you in their works from the very beginning—your flesh is their flesh from the get go) and all of them owe a great debt (I am sure Matheson would not deny it) to dear old Edgar Poe, that trapster of trapsters who, in his "The Pit and the Pendu-

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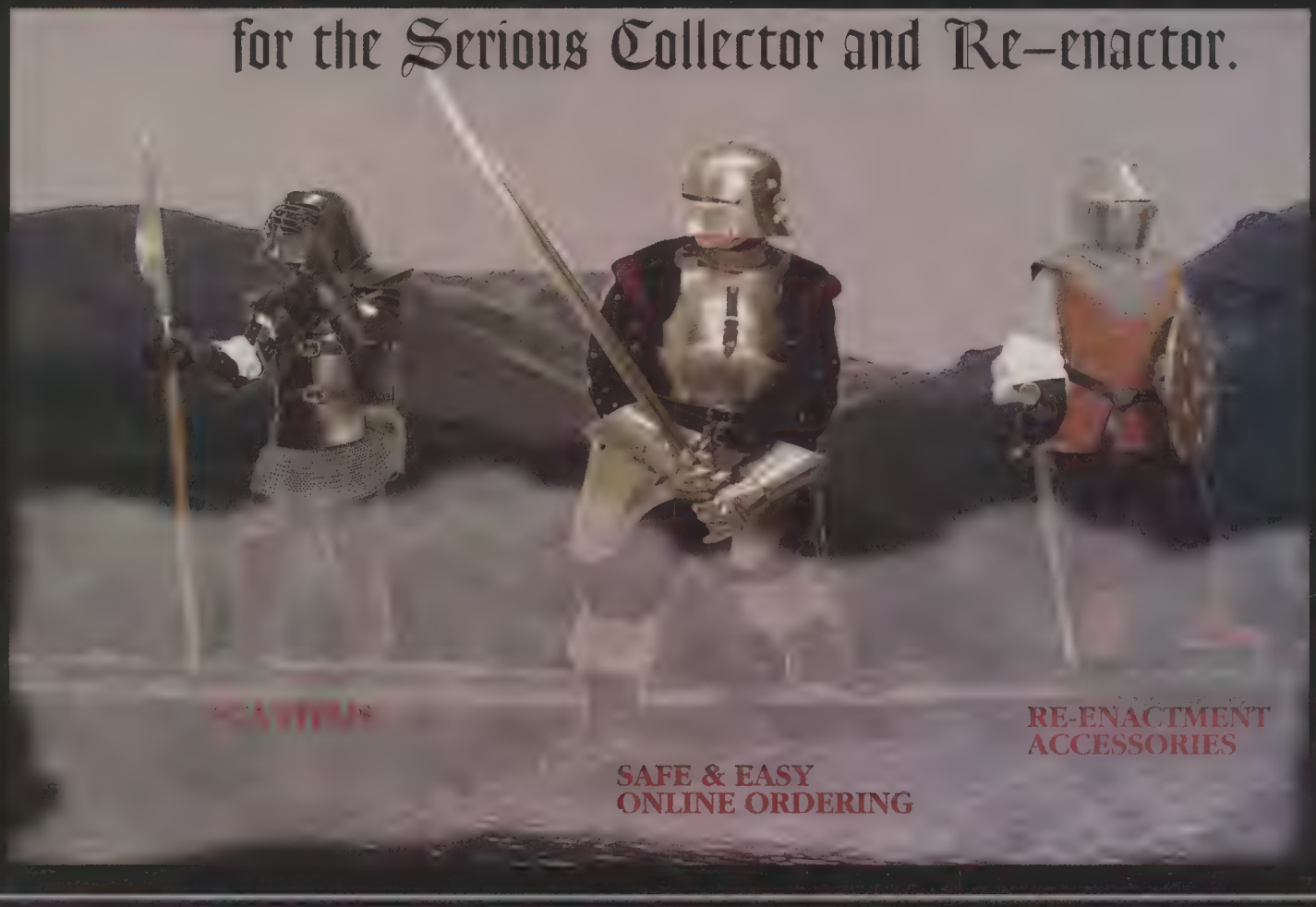

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lum," built and installed in the minds of countless helpless readers (including me, friend ... including me) a killing chamber that does not end with its iron walls merely coming together to crush you between them but with those walls heating as they mercilessly advance ever nearer to a painful glow so that you can see the saints painted upon them dance ironically in the pulsing air. Matheson obviously feels —and I think rightly so—that a trap is much more fun to spring if you know the victim has plenty of time to savor its effects.

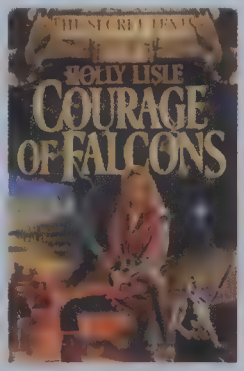
Also there's always a bit of a moral teaching somewhere in the heart of his tales, a little homily of one kind or another. "Prey," for example, points out the dangers of abandoning blood ties, but then "Slaughter House" teaches the dangers of isolating yourself from the society around you even if you do it in a familial fashion. Some tales contain more than one useful instruction. "Dance of the Dead," for example, only commences by pointing out the simple wisdom of the young listening to their mothers' warnings about the greater world that they have not yet begun to understand; it then goes on to develop the more advanced teaching that the cruelties of monstrous wars are by no means restricted to the entrapments produced so lavishly upon both combatants and harmless bystanders during the struggle itself, but that by their nature they create persisting remnants that can be confidently counted upon to also entrap endless generations of innocents to come.

So, you see, *Nightmare at 20,000 Feet* is dangerous in all kinds of ways. Particularly if you ever try to write this kind of stuff without bothering to read it and very carefully study its creator's lessons.

During the great era of newspaper comic strips the names of their heroes and heroines were household items and the whole of American humanity, from the highest and

BOOKS TO WATCH FOR

The Ant-Men of Tibet and Other Stories, *David Pringle, ed., Big Engine paperback, $8.99.* A brand-new collection of 10 stories from Britain's best-selling fantasy and sci fi magazine, *Interzone.* Stories are authored by eight British writers, one American, and one "American-in-exile." This is short fiction at its best: space opera, thrillers, comic fantasy, and significant storytelling! Stories by Jayme Lynn Blaschke, Molly Brown, Alastair Reynolds, and Eugene Byrne, among others are in- cluded. A necessary story collection for fantasy and science fiction fans.

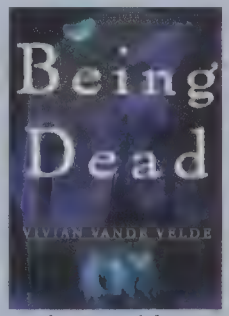


The Arthurian Companion, *2nd ed., by Phyllis Ann Karr, Pendragon paperback, $17.95.* This, the second edition of a book originally called *The King Arthur Companion,* is touted as having been intensively corrected and somewhat expanded! Based primarily on the "romantic storification" of the tale of King Arthur, rather than the realistic, this volume is a wonderful accruement to anyone wishing assistance as they wander in and out of fantasy tales, medieval romance, and purported historic tales of the legend known as King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, Camelot, and all the rest. Maps and charts include "Arthurian Britain," and "The Fisher Kings and the Kin of Pellinore." A comprehensive guide that should sit on your reading table at all times. Truly one of the most charming reference books available.

Courage of Falcons, "The Secret Texts, Book 3," *by Holly Lisle, Warner Aspect paperback, $6.99.* This novel follows *Diplomacy of Wolves* and *Vengeance of Dragons.* A band of fugitive wizards called "The Falcons" are at the heart of this riveting, classic tale of good vs. evil, Skinshifters vs. Dragons. The source of the Dragons' power, "the Mirror of Souls," must be destroyed. Skinshifters Kait Galweigh and Ry Sabir engage in heart-wrenching battle and make choices that will forever change the course of the entire world. Luercas must be stopped. Called a "solidly engaging conclusion to this ... imaginative yarn."

The Essential Ellison, A 50 Year Retrospective, *Edited and introduced by Terry Dowling, Morpheus International hardcover, $24.95.* In Terry Dowling's Introduction we are told that this book is a portrait of one artist as "sublime Rebel." A vast and ambitious collection is contained herein, beginning with a story of Ellison's called "The Sword of Parmagon," published in 1949 and concluding with 1990's "Xenogenesis." Ellison's Afterword is one of the best ever written, and possibly the briefest. This book is a record of an extraordinary talent, an extraordinary writing career. At the age of 67, Ellison has been writing for five decades, and since 1970 has produced 17 full-length poems of 50,000 words each. Included within the pages of this literary tome are fictions, essays, personal reminiscences, reviews (published for the first time anywhere), photographs, and a complete teleplay. Dowling states that Shakespeare would have smiled fondly and *The Los Angeles Times* labels Ellison "the 20th Century Lewis Carroll." For fans of Ellison's, those wishing insight into the soul of a true writer with the work to prove it—and those about to read Ellison for the first time—this book is important and *essential* to your collection.

Wizard Sword, *by William Hill, Otter Creek Press hardcover, $19.95. Wizard Sword* is a highly unusual mix of traditional fantasy and the modern world. This book has the classical theme of "a hero's journey with a dash of Walter Mitty." College students, a "frolicking dryad," a miniature dragon hooked on rock and roll, a drug-addled dragonlord, and a man seeking "godhood" are just a few of the creatures/characters you will come across in this rollicking tale. You will visit Elan, a magnificent realm of living elementals that has fallen prey to tyranny and enslavement. You will meet "the last-dimension dancer," called Wyn-Sauern—target of the evil Ruan Searr, with breeding in mind. And it all rests upon the youthful shoulders of Brin Williams, loser of memory, gainer of magical powers. The only spark of hope as the darkness encroaches upon the light. Great stuff from the author of the upcoming *Vegas Vampires.*



Being Dead, *by Vivian Vande Velde, Harcourt hardcover, $17.00.* For ages 12 and above, these are seven delicious tales of tingling terror and the gone, but not dead. Unfinished business is the theme. Vivian Vande Velde is the mistress of wit and dread—a perfect and difficult combination that will entertain and chill young readers and adults alike. Stories entitled "October Chill," "Dancing with Marjorie's Ghost," and "Shadow Brother," are included in the pages of this marvelous collection. ❧

most isolated by wealth down through the middle class to the lowest and most isolated by poverty, had at least a reasonably clear idea what villain Dick Tracy was presently pursuing, and what sort of trouble Little Orphan Annie had gotten into now, and could and would recite the latest wise aphorism from the lips of Pogo with the slightest of encouragements.

Nowadays, though their fans are legion, the main characters of even the more successful comic strips who manage to rise above the level of being minor celebrities are very few indeed and I strongly suspect that if you wasted the money on an in-depth survey you would discover that the vast majority of people really know very little about what's happened to them lately.

I think a good part of the reason for this is that, more and more, those lead characters have become increasingly conservative in a wide variety of ways so that everything about them from their bland humor to their extremely timid underlying philosophies to their essential lack of any meaningful activity seems to become less interesting year by year and, therefore, less memorable.

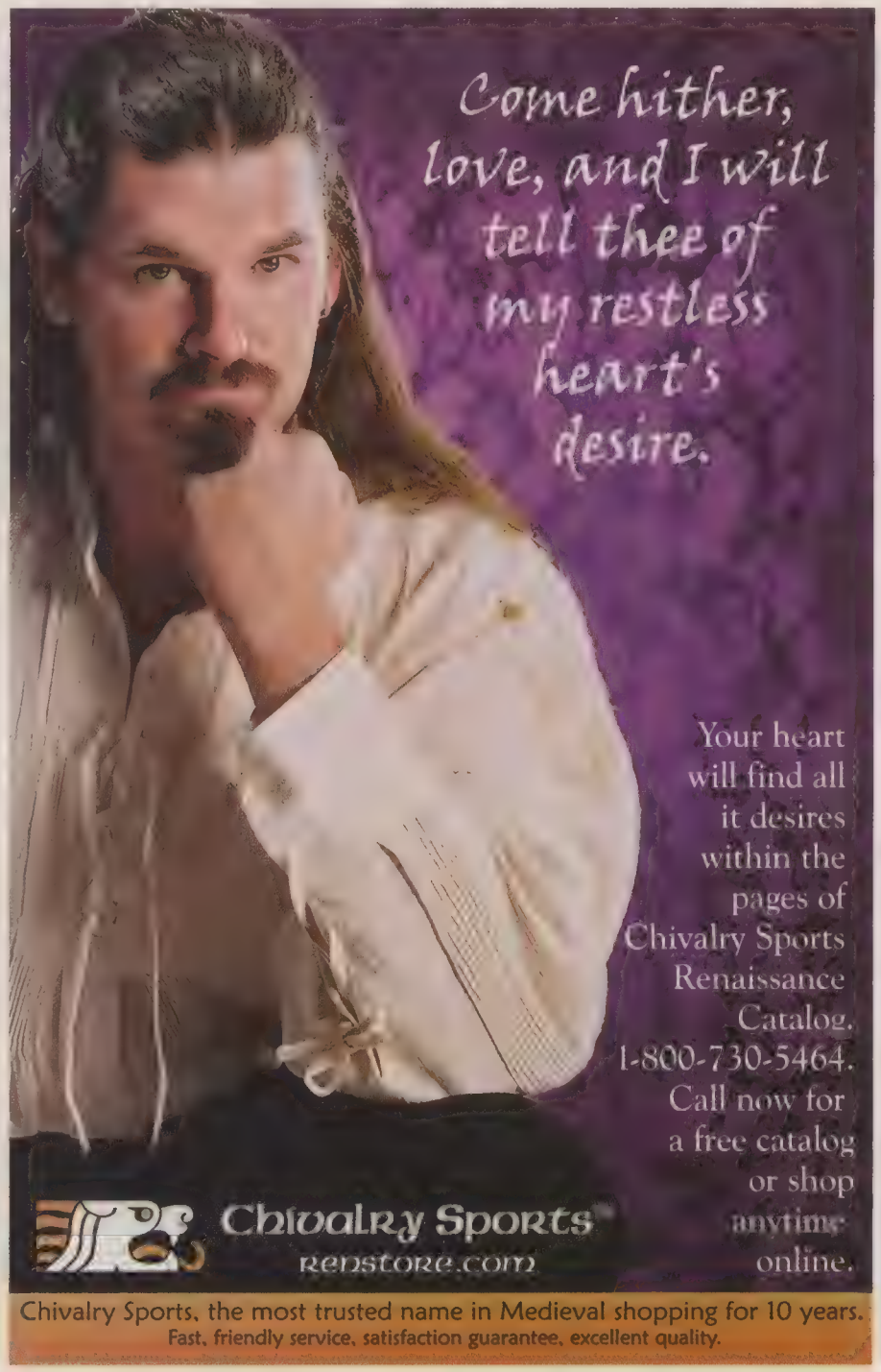
I find that—even though I am myself a cartoonist, albeit of the magazine inclination—I have become so uninterested in newspaper comic strips that if I am working a crossword puzzle (usually located, mind you, on the comic strip pages of the papers that still carry them) I usually draw a complete blank if asked to name the best pal or beloved pet of some definitely well-known cartoon character and have to work it out via the crossing word clues.

There is a very good (though not in the moral sense of the word) reason for this: More and nakedly the newspaper publishers have come to shamelessly shape what they publish in order to conform it to the desires and prejudices of their advertisers or even of their readers. I heard only recently, on very good authority, that a comic strip had been summarily dropped from a Boston paper because of one cranky letter. Just one. That's all it took.

In times of yore this wasn't the case because comic strips, along with a variety of other things, were defended by their publishers. A particularly famous one being the lifelong defense of Krazy Kat by none other than William Randolph Hearst.who insisted the editors of all his papers continue to carry the strip in spite of countless requests to ditch it. And there were many other such stalwart defenders.

And, praise be, there must still be a quantity of them because Bill Griffith continues to be able to see (along with the rest of us) his comic strip *Zippy the Pinhead* appear in a large number of newspapers.

If you have not come across Zippy, hunt him up. Ask your news dealer which local paper he's in and if he isn't in any of them contact their editors and tell them to carry him and if they don't, organize huge parades of citizens carry placards and blowing whistles and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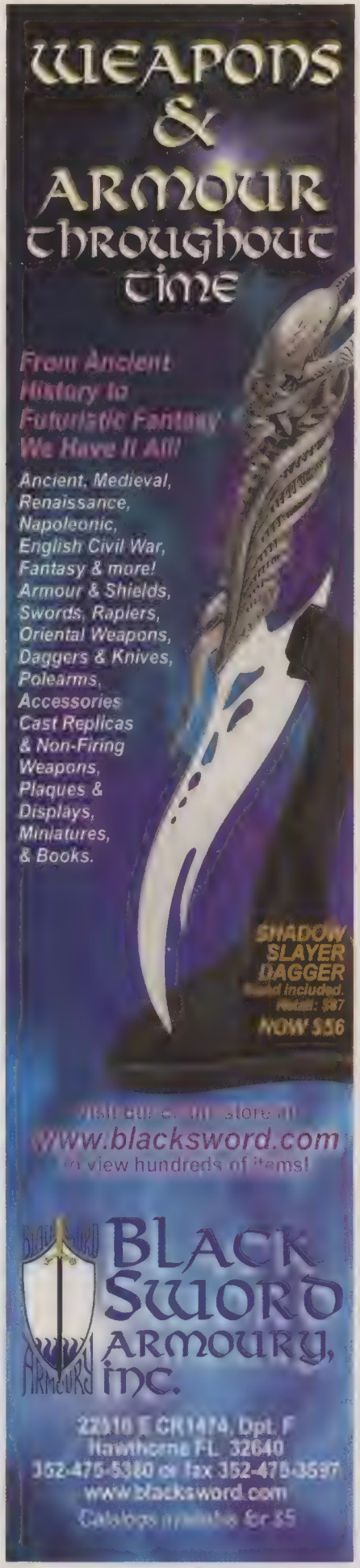
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tying up traffic until the establishment buckles.

Frankly, though I am certainly delighted and somewhat nervously encouraged at the phenomenon, I am more than a little puzzled to see dear old Zippy making it in the papers since he is a remarkably subversive fellow. He would have us forgive our fellow humans their foolishness and even love them in spite of their pathetic villainies and, God knows, that is not the prevailing philosophy in our times; indeed, it seems to be under steady attack.

But I'm happy to see that all my fears are merely ill-justified and paranoid suspicions, for there Zippy is, bless his pointy head, in the pages of the daily papers and, what's more, he has popped up in a large number of books through the years and now—brace yourselves!—we have Volume 2 of ***The Zippy Annual*** (by Bill Griffith; Fantagraphics Books, Seattle, WA; trade paperback; 144 pp.; $19.95). And I say Huzzah! Hooray! Atta boy, Zippy! That's what I say. Volume 1 could just have been a fluke (which you can still order from you local bookstore if it happens to be out of stock), but now we have *The Zippy Annual April 2001—September 2001* (to give it its full title) and now we know it's a trend.

If, by some tragic mischance, you have not before encountered Zippy, this would be a fine way for the two of you to get acquainted. Not only will you also meet such entertaining and instructive regulars as Mr. Toad (an example of pathetic villainy mentioned above), the dubious Claude (aging but still gamely doubting), and Griffy (who is the artist deviously sneaking into his own strip), but you will be introduced to a truly dazzling variety of famous roadside advertising statuary that has been—thanks to the contagion of Zippy magic—gifted with speech and therefore finally able to answer all kinds of questions we have been burning to ask them.

So buy the book ... and remember to badger those newspapers not carrying the strip. There's no law saying angry letters can't work both ways. At least not yet.

I freely admit that ***Algernon Blackwood, An Extraordinary Life*** by Mike Ashley (Carroll & Graff Publishers, NYC; hardcover; 386 pp.; $28.00) is aimed at only a very small fraction of readers of *Realms of Fantasy,* but those to whom it is aimed will be absolutely delighted to learn it exists and so I feel it would be extremely remiss of me not to mention in this column.

Algernon Blackwood gave us some of the best fantastic fiction ever written—as peers such as Lord Dunsany, H.G. Wells, and Howard Phillips Lovecraft have enthusiastically attested—and if you are not familiar with at least some of his best short stories such as "The Willows" and "The Wendigo" you should see to it that you read them lest you die deprived.

He was not only an extraordinary author, he was also a remarkable human being who, as account after account in this book shows, left astoundingly deep impressions on extremely sophisticated people who, though they had met many other legendary folk, made a point of putting him in a very special category. He clearly awed them.

I have heard and read bits and snatches about him and his life here and there through the years and these hints never failed to intrigue me, so when I came across a reviewer's copy of this book while on one of my weekly visits to *The New Yorker* [as a thoughtful kindness the magazine's management allows the staff to pile such books on a table after they have (or have not!) been reviewed and it's agreed they can be gleaned if wished by passers by] I snatched it up with a happy cry that visibly startled a nearby reviewer at her iMac and started devouring it greedily on my homeward commute.

It turns out all the hints had led me in the right direction and that Algernon Blackwood was an even more fascinating character than I'd hoped, indeed that he was, as the subtitle suggests, truly extraordinary. Mike Ashley not only gives us all kinds of fascinating trivia (I'd known he'd read some of his spooky stories on the BBC during Yuletide following the Christmas tradition, but was unaware he'd appeared on the first television show ever), but he does an extraordinarily thorough job of filling out all kinds of background details down to giving us a comprehensive appendix on the author's glittering family tree (packed with peers and landed gentry) and he's also managed to dig up all sorts of fascinating esoteric material including the best mine of information I've encountered regarding his occult associations, including those involved with the legendary Golden Dawn and its spin-off societies.

If, like myself, you've long been hankering to satisfy your curiosity about the remarkable Algernon Blackwood, this is the book that may just do it.

Gahan Wilson

Fantasy of the 20th Century, *Randy Broecker; Collectors Press, OR; hardcover*

256 pp.; $60.00.

This volume follows in the footsteps of its distinguished cousins, Frank Robinson's *Science Fiction of the 20th Century* and Robert Weinberg's *Horror of the Twentieth Century.* Like its predecessors, this oversized volume is a feast of sumptuous images—rare, exotic, and astonishing—evoking the splendor and range of fantastical literature and other media. But unlike the volumes by Robinson and Weinberg—both of whom are knowledgeable elder statesmen in their fields—the Broecker volume skates along rather tentatively on the thin ice of its text. While no outright factual errors occur—although I'm still dubious about the claim that the model for Lovecraft's Arkham was Providence rather than Salem—there are likewise no arcane tidbits revealed, no above-average depth of coverage benefiting from the author's firsthand experience. Broecker does a creditable, earnest, heartfelt job assembling the Consensus History of Modern Fantasy, but any reader with some small experience will encounter no surprises here.

Still, it's good to have all the mainline facts in one place, buttressed by the gorgeous reproductions of book covers, movie posters, and magazine illustrations. Collectors Press always goes the extra mile to make sure that its various volumes do not overlap, and anyone who purchased the earlier assemblages will find a wealth of unique images here that are not contained in the Robinson or Weinberg. I would have liked a bit more coverage of childrens' fantasy (where's E. Nesbit, for instance?). Cartoon fantasy is missing entirely (*Fantasia* anyone?). But I suppose such minor lacunae are merely testament to how large and varied the field of fantasy is. On the whole, Broecker wrestles this Protean subject with respectable vigor and honor.

Book of the Dead, *E. Hoffman Price; Arkham House, WI; hardcover; 423 pp.; $34.95.*

Once giants walked the earth—men and women of the early 20th century who were busy inventing the very genre of fantasy as we know it today. Writers with such names as H.P. Lovecraft, Clark Ashton Smith, Henry Kuttner, C.L. Moore, Edmond Hamilton, Leigh Brackett, and Robert E. Howard. Their work appeared in many magazines, but most importantly in *Weird Tales*, "the unique magazine." One man knew all these figures and many others: E. Hoffman Price. Himself a storyteller of no small talents, Price (1898-1988) was a central node in the *Weird Tales* circuit. Traveling enthusiastically around the country with a variety of wives—when he wasn't busy churning out some of the five million words of fiction he eventually counted as his career total for the zines—Price knitted the community together, visiting one geographically scattered friend after another.

Continued on page 84

If our fates are predestined,
is it possible to be greater than our natures?

kallisti

Can fate allow for free will?

Ares looked at his sister with open admiration.

"What are you planning, Eris? What's happened?"

Eris looked up from her workbench, sweat glistening on her face. The object on the bench was beginning to take shape. Ares didn't yet understand what she was doing, but he surely knew what it meant: trouble. Ares was the God of War. He approved of trouble, and so had a deep regard for his younger sister.

Eris, Goddess of Discord.

"They didn't invite me!" she said. It was more of a snarl.

"Who didn't invite you? To what?"

"Zeus! Hera! They didn't invite me to the wedding feast, of course. King Peleus and Thetis are to be wed."

"So I've heard. As for the rest ..." Ares shrugged. "You're my own dear sister but is it reasonable to invite Discord to a wedding? Especially this one?"

"Why this one?" Eris asked.

By Richard Parks • Illustration by David Seeley

"Zeus wanted Thetis himself, yet her destiny is that she will bear a son greater than his father."

Eris almost smiled, despite her anger. "I think I see his dilemma. Is that why he's making her wed a mortal?"

"Indeed. Zeus cannot lie with Thetis, nor allow any other god to do so."

"Granted, but that's not my concern and beside the matter," Eris said. "Which is that I was slighted and will have my revenge. What else can I do? It is my nature."

Ares frowned. "You seem ... hesitant. Would you have gone had they asked?"

"Of course not!" She gave him a disturbing look. "You were invited, weren't you?"

Ares nodded. "Yes." He apparently noticed her glare and quickly added, "I wasn't going, of course. Out of respect for you." Ares might have liked trouble, but he wasn't a fool.

Eris turned back to her work, slightly mollified. Being Eris, she was never more than slightly mollified until her anger had been appeased. Strangely enough, Ares, the God of War and Strife, was one of the very few who could do it.

Eris smiled at her brother. "Oh, I think you should go."

There was a strong hint in her tone, and Ares, slow as he sometimes was, clearly took that hint. He waited until the object of her attention was finally done. She held it up, flushed with excitement.

Ares just stared at the thing. He examined it this way and that, read the inscription, stared some more. "It's a golden apple with some writing on it," he said.

"Yes," she said. The fact should have been self-evident but it apparently was not, at least to Eris's brother.

"It's lovely," he said, "but I don't understand what it's for."

Eris glared at him. "It's not just the apple! It's the apple and the word *together*."

"It just says 'Kallisti.'"

"'To the fairest,' yes," Eris confirmed with more patience than was normal for her.

"I still don't understand," Ares said.

"I'm not sure I do either," Eris said. "What I am about to do seems cruel out of all proportion to the wrong done me, yet I am going to do it and I am going to smile when it happens. They were right not to invite me. Not that this changes what I will do, even a little."

Ares sighed. "Then what would you have me do, Eris?"

Eris shrugged. "Do? You will do what I am going to do: go the wedding, invited or not. I know you, brother. I think you will enjoy this."

"Mortals are always getting underfoot as

The world had changed in less than a heartbeat. One moment Paris, Prince of Troy, was watching his flocks like any good shepherd. The next moment he was holding an apple of pure gold he found lying beneath a bush. He read the single word inscribed on it: "Kallisti."

To the fairest?

"To whom shall you award it?"

Startled, Paris looked up to see that there were three extremely lovely goddesses standing in front of him. "Your Divinities, I don't understand."

Hera glared. "Zeus decreed that whoever found the apple was to judge which of us three was worthy to receive it. Must I repeat myself?"

Paris bowed humbly. "It's just that I'm unable to believe my great good fortune."

"It's unwise to lie to a goddess," Athena said. "You're afraid of us."

"And if you're wise you'll fear me the most," Aphrodite said.

Hera raised a hand imperiously. "Such threats are undignified. In any event, we all know the apple belongs to *me*. Choose quickly, my good Paris, and we can put this unpleasantness behind us."

Once Paris got over his shock and surprise enough to actually *look* at the goddesses before him it seemed an impossible choice to make honestly. Hera was rather matronly but that didn't detract a whit from her poise and refined, regal beauty. Athena was tall and dark haired, and to call her statuesque didn't even do her justice. There was an elegance about her that was nothing short of stunning. As for Aphrodite, well, Paris's reason turned to mist whenever she smiled at him.

Paris finally shook his head. "No."

All three sets of goddess eyebrows raised and Paris saw the fires of Hades burning in their eyes.

"No?? You have no choice!" they said as one.

"Your pardon, Your Divines, but by your own words I have one choice: who is to get the apple. And I'm not such a fool that I don't know that, whichever one I favor, I make enemies of the other two. Disputes between goddesses and mortals tend to be a bit one-sided, if the stories are true."

"Nonsense," Hera said. "We won't harm you. Zeus made us swear to it."

Paris was not reassured in the least. "It's not particularly unwise for a goddess to lie to a mortal," Paris said, "since there are seldom consequences for *her*. Yet it's never to the mortal's advantage."

All three goddesses merely smiled at him. If Paris hadn't already been frightened, now he was honestly terrified. Paris managed to keep his tone light though the effort cost him. "This is a very important decision, as you no doubt agree, and not to be made in haste. At the least I need time to consider."

"You have until tomorrow," Hera said.

The goddesses disappeared, and it was only then that Paris put his head in his hands. "What am I going to do?!"

"There is not much you can do, really," said someone who hadn't spoken before now. Paris looked up.

Just to the side of where the goddesses had been, a rather plain young girl was leaning against a cedar, a fierce frown on her face. That is to say, she *looked* like a plain young girl at first glance, but by the glow about her Paris knew a goddess when he saw one.

Paris sighed. "Who are you?"

"My name is Eris."

"Not ..." Paris didn't finish.

The girl nodded, looking a little less fierce and a little more melancholy. "Goddess of Discord. Yes, the same. That's my apple."

"It is? But you weren't with the others."

She sighed. "I didn't say I wanted judgment, dolt! I said it was *mine*. I made it."

The implication of what the girl—and Paris thought of her as a girl, despite her obvious divinity—was saying sank in. "You've destroyed me."

"Yes." She shrugged. "Not that it was my intention." Eris quickly related how and why the apple had come to be. "I had to do something to get back at them."

Paris held up the apple. "And how does *this* get back at *them*?"

Eris smiled. "It ruined the wedding feast, of course. It was a rather good feast before I sent that apple rolling into the banquet hall and those three cows started squabbling over it. 'To the fairest'? It was inevitable, though I'm surprised Thetis didn't join them.

trampled

we go about our business."

Zeus was terrified it would interfere with the wedding itself. He was whiter than frost."

"Zeus? Afraid? Why?"

Eris sighed. "Because the Oracles say Thetis is destined to have a son greater than his father. By securing her marriage to a mere mortal, Zeus insures that the eventual child will be mortal also, and thus not a threat to his power. Simple. I almost ruined that."

Paris was having a lot of trouble getting his mind to expand enough to grasp the nuances of divine politics and society. All he knew was that come tomorrow his life wasn't worth a pile of steaming offal. "Eris, why are you here? Have you come to gloat?"

"I wasn't thinking past my anger, to tell the truth," Eris said. "I seldom do. Yet I never intended anyone else to get caught up in this. I expected the fight, then for Zeus to give the judgment, and have all the ones *not* chosen be angry at *him*. I should have known the clever fox would escape my trap. Anyway, I wasn't angry anymore, so I've been looking for the apple to get rid of it. Then I heard that I was too late. Naturally I came to see what happened." She looked him up and down. "Pity."

Paris put his head back in his hands. "If you had known, would it have changed anything?"

"No," Eris said frankly. "I'm a goddess. You're a mortal. Mortals are always getting trampled underfoot as we go about our business, and that's the price of being a mortal. I pay my own for being what I am."

Paris looked up again. "What are you talking about? What could be the disadvantages of being divine?"

Eris nodded, looking grim. "Spoken with the typical certainty of one who doesn't know what he's talking about. How would you like it if everything you were or wanted to be was out of your hands?"

There was such pain and anger in the girl's voice that, for a little while, Paris forgot his own difficulties. "What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm the Goddess of Discord. Do you think it's because I'm a troublemaker by nature?"

Paris thought about it for a moment. "Meaning no offense ... aren't you?"

She put her hands on her hips. "I feel very strongly and I act on what I feel. I won't say I'm sorry I ruined Zeus's party because I'm not. Not one bit. Yet since I'm a goddess everything I do is an act of creation and has a life beyond me, and even a goddess doesn't know all consequences of her actions. Does that mean I should refuse to act? Do nothing? Be nothing?"

"What about the three who were here earlier?"

Eris nodded. "It's the same: Hera is Queen of Heaven because she likes having her way. In a human, that's annoying. In a goddess it's worse. Athena actually is very wise—when her pride isn't in the way—but no one who takes her advice fully understands it and often comes to grief. Aphrodite can't make anyone fall in love as such. It's more that she is in love with the *idea* of love. She can't help it and she can't stop, and you *know* what kind of misery that can cause."

"Not yet I don't," Paris said.

Now Eris blinked. "You've never been in love?"

"No. Nor am I likely to, before the two goddesses who *don't* get the apple do something horrible to me. Have you?"

Eris frowned. "Love? I don't think so." It was clear from her tone that the question had never even occurred to her.

Paris's sigh was full of regret. "I hear love is wonderful and terrible all at once. It's something I'd like to experience for myself."

"Then do so."

Paris laughed bitterly. "How? This time tomorrow I'll probably be dead."

Eris shook her head. "Neither will just kill you outright."

"Because of their promise to Zeus?"

"Yes," Eris said. "It won't stop them from seeking revenge by other means, mind, but that will take time to arrange. You use that time to fall in love."

"I haven't been able to do so in 20 years of life. I doubt there's that much left to me, even with the delay."

Eris looked thoughtful. "By Zeus's decree the apple sought an honest judge, and that turned out to be you, Paris. So tell me the truth: Is there one of those three you consider most beautiful?"

Paris shook his head. "That's another problem. It's like trying to choose between three stars in the sky! I can't do it."

"Then don't." Paris opened his mouth to protest but Eris raised her hand. "No, you said it yourself—what you really must do is give the apple. That's your one choice. In her heart each of those harpies knows she is the fairest. They just want the apple for what it represents and so it's the *apple* that is their goal, not the judgment." Eris shrugged. "So don't choose who is the fairest — choose *which one gets the apple*. Let the best offer win."

"They're going to bribe me?"

Eris rolled her eyes. "Of course! You don't think they care for fairness, do you? I got you into this. I cannot get you out, but for what it's worth I say listen to what they offer. You make enemies of two goddesses tomorrow, and you and I both know what that means. As long as you're paying the price, choose the merchandise you like best."

Paris thought about it. "Aphrodite ... I could choose love?"

Eris smiled sadly. "You can choose whatever you want. Another advantage of being mortal, though for some reason you seem to feel it a curse."

Eris slowly faded away.

"Don't ..." Paris started to say "don't go" to the Goddess of Discord, but felt foolish. Still, she was the closest thing to a friendly voice Paris had heard all day.

Eris just smiled before she vanished. "Don't worry, Paris. I am Discord. More than likely you will see me again if you wish to or not."

And Paris knew she was no doubt right.

"Mortals die all

Whatever Eris's skills as an adviser, it was soon clear she made a good enough prophet. That night in his dreams the three goddesses came to Paris. Hera, being Queen of Heaven, arrived first, splendid and regal. She had forsaken much of what made her appear human to enter the realm of dreams. She was more aspect than woman now, all symbol and dark fire. She took a long slow look around Paris's dreams first, but they were rather innocuous, tentative things that night. If she was looking for his heart's desire she didn't find it.

"I can make you ruler of the world," she said. "Most men would like that."

"If I give you the apple?" Paris said.

Hera glared. "Of course if you give it to me, fool!"

"It is a fine offer," Paris said.

"You won't have a better one," Hera said, and then she left. No haggling, no chance for discussion. Every inch and more a Queen. Paris shrugged and got back to his dreams.

Athena was next. She appeared in full armor and glory blazing, but it was only a dream and Paris was not consumed.

"I offer you great wisdom," she said.

"For the apple?"

"If you can ask that, then you need my gift more than you know," Athena said, and that was all. She vanished.

A little impatient, but her grasp of the situation is clear enough.

The dream was calling Paris back. It threatened to turn into something pleasant and vivid, but Paris knew there was no point. He kept the dream at bay while he waited for what he knew was to come.

Whereas the other two goddesses had just appeared, Aphrodite by contrast Made an Entrance in a golden chariot pulled by golden, black-maned lions. There was one other difference: while the other two told Paris what they would give him, Aphrodite asked a question.

"All right, Mortal—What do you want?"

"I want to fall in love."

The goddess frowned. "Is that all?"

Paris remembered what Eris had told him. "Since I'm likely to die very soon, I consider that a great deal," Paris said. "Neither great wisdom nor great power would do me much good in these circumstances, so I'm asking for what I want."

The Goddess of Love sighed. "For a mortal, you're fairly wise. Yes, it's unlikely those other two will forgive you, even though by all right the apple is mine anyway. Very well; I'll grant you your wish if tomorrow morning you give the apple to me."

Paris, remembering what Eris said about Aphrodite's limitations, had to ask. "With all due respect, Your Divinity, how will you do this?"

She glared. "How? I'll give you the most beautiful mortal woman on earth as your bride! You'll fall in love then, I wager."

Paris frowned. "Perhaps ... You mean Helen of Sparta? She's married to Menelaus!"

Aphrodite dismissed that small detail. "You give me the apple and I'll arrange it."

"All right, but it's just a lump of gold," Paris said. He knew there was no point, but thought it needed to be said.

"Nothing is just what it is made of," Aphrodite said, and she drove her chariot right out of his dreams. The next morning Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite and sealed his doom.

Eris, being a goddess, wasn't the best judge of time. She didn't know how much time elapsed before the prayers started. Years, she was pretty certain, but how many? She wasn't sure. Neither was she certain how long the prayers had continued once they *did* begin. A week or more. That there were prayers at all was very much a surprise; no one prayed to Eris. No one wanted to attract her attention, which Eris thought only proper and sensible. Now someone did want to attract her attention. Someone familiar. And the strangest part was that her supplicant ...wasn't, really. He wasn't asking for anything. Smiting or confusing his enemies or anything one might expect. He was simply calling her name. Eris was too stunned to do much about it for a long time.

The fool, she finally said. *The complete and utter dear fool.*

She sought out her brother for advice. She found him, as usual, preparing for a fight. Someone else's, of course. That was his nature. "Ares, can I ask you something?"

The God of War looked up from his new armor. "Hmmm? What is it? I'm busy. Hephaestus has no reason to love me and I just *know* there is a curse on this armor somewhere. I'm going to find it."

"Your new metal splendor can wait. I want to know: Have you ever regretted something you've done?"

Ares grunted. "I'm a god. Why should I regret anything?"

"Don't you regret sleeping with Aphrodite, Hephaestus's wife? You should."

He laughed. "No, I regret getting caught. It was embarrassing. Did I regret lying with Aphrodite? No, I did not and do not regret that. In fact I'll do it again if I get the chance."

"Knowing that one you probably will," Eris said dryly. "So. Why the new armor? Especially since the Divine Blacksmith is still annoyed at you."

"It's for the *war,* Sister. Haven't you heard? Paris of Troy has kidnaped Menelaus's winsome wife. There's to be a big war about it."

Eris didn't breathe for a while. Being a goddess it didn't really hurt her, but Ares apparently noted the changing colors in her face after a bit. "You didn't know? I'm surprised. It was all because of your apple, you know. You've outdone yourself, Eris."

"Thank you," Eris said quietly. "I worked really hard on that apple."

"And so clever! Just writing 'To the fairest' on the thing, that one touch. And I didn't understand how that would cause trouble, but you were right; dropping a naked gorgon on the party wouldn't have done half as much. I really am in awe, Sister."

"Thank you," Eris repeated, and then turned to leave.

"Where are you going?"

"To see the Oracles. As a goddess it's my prerogative to take an interest in the world."

The war was going very badly. Not too surprising, since most of the gods had lined up against Priam's city. Paris watched the battle from a palace window. Much had been made of the fact that he had shirked the fighting before now, but the truth of the matter was he was better suited to shepherding than fighting, and had never shown much interest in the latter before. Yet Hector was dead now, and without him Paris's options were fast diminishing. His armor had been brought to him, but he dismissed his servants and stood by the window, watching men die.

"I wish I had the choice over again," he said aloud, to no one in particular.

"Who would you have chosen then?"

Paris turned around. It was Eris. He hadn't seen her since the day of the judgment, and he smiled hesitantly but he didn't answer her

the time . . . with or without our help."

question. "I prayed that you would come."

"And I heard you," Eris said. "Though why you'd want to see me is beyond my understanding. Yet I suppose you have the right to see your Nemesis ... metaphorically speaking." She came to the window herself, looked out over the carnage below. "I'm the Goddess of Discord. I suppose I should be enjoying this."

"You don't look as if you are."

"It's the lot of goddesses to be defined by their impulses, and the lot of their impulses to get out of control. I wanted revenge, but not this. I didn't know it was all preordained."

"What do you mean, Eris?"

"I mean I've consulted Oracles since. If it helps, take comfort that you were fated to choose Aphrodite. I'm trying to."

Paris sighed. "So even my one choice was made for me."

Eris shook her head. "Even a fated choice is a free one. Knowing what you would choose is not the same as choosing for you."

Paris laughed. "I knew I was doomed. I didn't know just how thoroughly. It's hard to take comfort from that, but at least it does no harm."

Eris shrugged. "How is Helen?"

"Lovely almost beyond mortal comprehension. Also vain, self-centered, and with as much wit as a rutting sow. No wonder Aphrodite picked her out."

"I'm sorry."

Paris shrugged. "It shouldn't have come as a surprise, but Aphrodite betrayed me. She got me Helen at the cost of this war with the Greeks! At this rate the other goddesses will have their revenge with no effort at all, and at the hands of the one goddess who had no quarrel with me! I'm a fool mortal and don't understand these things, but surely there was another way."

Eris shook her head. "There wasn't. I told you, the choice was fated, the *war* was fated, and even the gods don't muck with destiny."

Paris frowned. "How can you say that? Yes, you sent the apple, but didn't this all really start because Zeus was trying to cheat fate?"

Eris smiled then, faintly. "No." Paris just looked at her, uncomprehending, and Eris went on, "As I told you,: the Oracle said that Thetis was destined to bear a child greater than the father. The Oracle did not say, 'Thetis will bear a child who will one day overthrow Zeus.' If she *had* done so, then Zeus would be as doomed as you are. Yet there was a danger, and Zeus moved to eliminate it. He did what he could. That's what we all do, gods and mortals alike."

"I can do nothing," Paris said bitterly.

"You can't do much," Eris corrected, "but that's not nothing. Take your bow and string it."

Puzzled, Paris did as she instructed. Eris took an arrow from his quiver and daintily licked the barb. She handed the arrow to Paris. "I'm full of poison. That's my nature," she said. It sounded like an apology. "I've envenomed the tip. Shoot Achilles with it."

Paris just stared at the arrow. "What good will that do? Achilles is invulnerable; even mighty Hector couldn't kill him!"

"Achilles is mortal, just as you are. And he is fated to die in this war."

"He is? Does that mean I'm fated to kill him?"

Eris smiled a sad smile. "You do see the difference, don't you? No, the Oracle just said that he will die. This part isn't fate, Paris. *This* part is the thing you can change. It's a small thing, I know, but as I said we all do what we can."

Paris took the arrow. The great Achilles rampaged through the battlefield below like a force of nature, striking down Trojan warriors left and right. There was a light of battle in his eyes like a beacon, or a funeral pyre, or the flames that were beginning to rise within the city itself. The screams of the wounded and dying reached up to Paris's window.

"If I kill him, will it save my city?" Paris asked.

Eris shook her head. "No. Yet if you do this, perhaps, something of what it was may be spared. Some of your people may live. I don't know for certain. I do know that if Achilles carries this particular battle before his death no one will be spared."

"Then it's enough." Paris put the nock to the string.

Eris watched him, almost shyly. "For what it's worth, I'm sorry you didn't find love. I know it was what you wanted."

"I never said that I didn't find love, Eris."

She blinked. "Despite Helen's shortcomings? Well, mortals are such fools...though sometimes that's to your advantage. Still, I'm glad for you."

Paris smiled faintly. In fact, Paris didn't think Eris looked very happy at all, and he thought he understood why. It felt good, understanding one thing the goddess did not.

Eris went on. "It was what you wanted, I mean. You deserved as much. So despite Aphrodite's betrayal at least she fulfilled that part of the bargain."

Paris shrugged. "No, she didn't."

"But you said..."

"That I fell in love, and I did. It just took a while for me to realize what had occurred. It changes nothing, now, but at least it did happen."

Eris looked confused and, after that, just a little afraid. "Mortals die all the time," she said, as if to herself. "With or without our help. One more doesn't matter...." Her small hands balled into fists. "Oh, sod that!" Eris looked right at Paris. "I never should have made that cursed apple," she said.

Paris nodded. "You're right, but you weren't the only one who made a mistake. I should have given the apple to you."

Eris just stared for several moments. "But *why?*" she finally asked. "Because I made it?"

Paris smiled at her. "Most artisans do not own what they make. No, Eris. Because you never meant to harm me, and never played me false. There's beauty in that, and more than I had sense to realize. I should have given you the apple because it belongs to you by right. Kallisti. The Fairest."

Eris just stared at him for a moment. "You would give the apple to the one responsible for all your misery?!"

"Yes," Paris said. "I would."

Eris smiled then. "Mortals are such fools," she said again, though it didn't sound like an insult this time. "Choose," she said.

Paris turned back to the window and let the arrow fly. ❧

By James Patrick Kelly
Illustration by Patrick Arrasmith

Hubris

"May you attract the attention of the gods"

is an ancient curse. Ever wonder why?

Kommos: A Song of Lament

This, dear reader, is a story about a curse. Before my encounter with Kleio, the muse of history, I was like you, large with possibility. If I had boundaries, they were invisible to me. As yours are to you, I suppose. But now I have shrunk. I am small enough to scuttle between black marks on a page, with no past but what you see here, and even less future. By the time you finish reading this, I will cease to exist.

Already your eye wanders. Is this about magic then? Of course you don't believe; I didn't either. The Olympian gods are cruel and barbaric lies, right? We are no longer subject to their caprice. Everything has an explanation, or will have. Someday someone will figure out how brain cells generate mind. It's not your problem when the wobble of a muon throws physics into chaos.

Aha! You thought I was at a safe remove from you, shackled to the dank stone of a Theban prison, perhaps, or bound upside-down to a crag jutting from Homer's wine-dark sea. Sorry, but mine could easily be the blue cubicle with the Boston fern and the *Matrix* poster. If I were chained, it would be to a laptop and a cell phone. Was I behind you in the lunch line the other day? Maybe I was the one who took your favorite parking space.

I wish I could tell you of the lovers I left, the houses I built, the money I gave away, but she has taken all that from me, dear reader. I'd like to think I got my picture in the paper at least once ....

Moira: fate; what must happen; that which is one's due

In ancient Greek, the muse's name is Κλειω. We meet at a writers' workshop offered by the Cambridge Adult Education Center. It's called "The Art of the Short Story." I myself have no literary ambitions, but an adult education course is a great place to meet women. I actually sign up for four courses; the others are "Ballroom Dancing," "Astanga Vinyasa Yoga" and "Theater Games." I'm not sure why I choose this ploy; I wouldn't say that I am particularly shy. Perhaps I'm new in town.

Our teacher is a failed novelist who last published in 1994. He smells of cinnamon breath mints and is kind to illiterates. The other students are a denim and leather dream; I see a lotus tattoo and a green turtleneck and a Red Sox cap. Somebody wears a tie.

Is Kleio beautiful? Her glasses are tiny and rimless and obscure her brown eyes. She has a heart-shaped face but wears her hair too long. Her smile is as bright as the moon but two of her canines are crooked. Her legs are hard, her fingers stubby. You might say no, not pretty at all, but as soon as I see her, I want to be the one who takes her glasses off.

Her story is about severed heads. It is tastefully written so we are forced to take it seriously. The heads are not dead and they seem grateful for the chance to live on without their bodies. They are kept in glass bells in a locked room. Two of them are in love. The keeper of the heads is kindly and philosophical. He is something like God, except that he drinks because he can never become a living, severed head. Who would take care of them then? Also he is in love with one of the heads who love each other. He and the heads have long talks but none of them understands his pain.

A student begins the critique of Kleio's story by objecting that the heads would never be able to talk, since no matter where the cut was made, there would be severe damage to the vocal cords. There is some trifling discussion of anatomy before I raise my hand.

"The heads are a metaphor," I say. "When Shakespeare writes 'All the world's a stage,' we don't ask him if it's a proscenium or where the audience sits." I have Kleio's attention now. "I think the heads are supposed to symbolize the way some of us are cut off from what is important. We have no context, sitting in cubicles staring at computers. We have forgotten that there is more to the world than glowing phosphors."

The class ends before we get to my story, which means that we'll never know what I wrote about, since, obviously, it isn't part of *this* story. As I gather my notes, Kleio approaches and asks if I'd like to stop someplace for drinks. By the time we reach the sidewalk, it is decided that we'll go to her place.

Of course, this is totally unfair. If we choose my place, then we would see my things. You and I, dear reader. Do I have hockey trophies on the mantle? Is there Gruyère in the fridge? How big is my TV? I'm curious; aren't you? Why should that be a tragic flaw? We could open my closet, peek at my yearbooks, look under my bed ....

Ethe: style; one's moral qualities and mental dispositions; character

She lives on the second floor of a white, vinyl-sided triple-decker just outside of Davis Square. She throws back dual bolts of her metal door and ushers me into a living room that smells of old books. They are everywhere, on shelves to the ceiling, in stacks on the Minoan Berber rug, open and scattered in spine-cracking disarray on a plastic kidney-shaped table and a nubbly green-going-to-yellow couch. She watches me pick them up and tilt them into the sepia light of her reading lamp: Herodotus's *History, Forts and Fortresses* by Martin Brice, Carl Jung's *Synchronicity, Witchcraft Among the Azande* by E.E. Evans-Pritchard. The pages are brown and mealy.

"What do they tell you about me?" she asks.

"That you don't believe in paperbacks?"

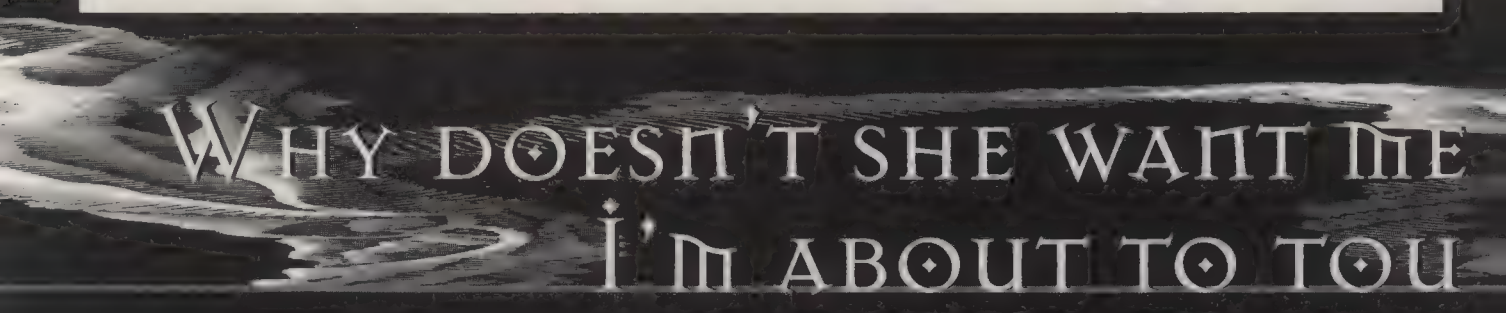
"They fall apart if you read them too hard." She takes my hand. "Come on, I'll pour." Her hand rests in mine, light as a stunned bird, as we pass deeper into her apartment. "Red or white?"

The kitchen is done in fifties' style. The round table has shining chrome legs and a ketchup-colored formica top. The chairs are upholstered in red and white vinyl. The appliances are vintage too: big steel with round shoulders.

"Where did you find all this?" I ask.

"In stores." She cradles a bottle of Kourtaki Retsina for my approval.

I don't want to spoil the moment, so I approve. She fills my glass. "You like to go antiquing then?" I say. The pale wine



throws an oily, evil scent.

"Actually," she says, "I bought these things new."

"Oh, right," I say. "And you've got a closet full of heads in your bedroom."

"No, it's true." When she gives me a dark look, I sip the wine to please her. The stuff is bitter as pine sap but with a heroic effort I manage a smile.

"I don't like people who doubt," she says.

I wonder why she is tweaking me. It's clear that she hasn't seen her 20s in some time but I can't imagine that she is older than 40. I don't waste much time wondering how old people are anymore. There are children, teenagers, 20-somethings, and the elderly. To me, everyone else is the same age. Us, for instance. You and I.

ADYTON: THE INNERMOST SHRINE; A PLACE THAT MUST NOT BE ENTERED

I can see wallpaper of yellow daisies in Kleio's bedroom and an autographed picture of Joseph Campbell on the dresser before she turns out the overhead light. My hands are damp; I rub them on my chinos. Kleio is a shadow gliding past me. A match flares and she lights three candles on the night table. Her bed is a vast darkness. I could sit on it, or even lie back to wait for her, but I stand and watch the play of candlelight on her face. She blows out the match and comes into my arms. She tastes of the Retsina; her breath is hot. A moan catches in her throat as I sift her long hair through my fingers. A few wisps stray across her face. I bring my hand up to the left temple of her glasses and lift them, just enough to let her know that I can. She kisses me again. The tip of her tongue darts across the ledges of my front teeth and then she pulls away.

"I'll be right back." She straightens her glasses. "Don't touch anything."

She shuts the bathroom door behind her and now I settle onto the bed. I decide it might be good idea to take off my shoes, but that's all I'm taking off. She can decide what else needs to go. I push my palm into her pillow to test its loft and am filled with doubt. Why doesn't she want me to touch anything when I am about to touch her everywhere? I flick my forefinger through the flame of the nearest candle. The fire doesn't burn me but the question does. Don't touch anything. The nightstand has two drawers. Don't touch. I can hear water running in the bathroom. *Don't.* The drawers have brass ring pulls.

Is that the difference between us, dear reader? That you wait? If you need something to do, you tuck your wallet into your shoe or hum "They Can't Take That Away From Me." That's why you know who your mother is and what you had for breakfast this morning and where you live and when you lost your virginity.

Well, she takes everything away from me but what's here before you. Because when she says *don't*, I hear *you must*

HAMARTIA: HARM DONE THROUGH SELF-WILL; IMMODERATE BEHAVIOR; ERROR

I don't make the obvious choice; it's the bottom drawer that I pull open. It isn't empty. I slide the candle to the edge of the nightstand and see the *Verizon Yellow Pages, Cambridge and Vicinity.* But I disturb something, something that lives in the top drawer, something that moves with a silky slither, like the whisper of skin on skin, and I hear myself breathing and the door latch clicks and I kick the drawer shut but it is too late because Kleio comes out of the blinding bathroom light, Kleio, daughter of Zeus and Memory, whom men call the muse of history, and she is naked and she is huge, she has to stoop to fit through the doorway and she screams at me *What have you done?* only it is the roar of blood in my ears that I hear as she puts her enormous hand on my head and pushes down and says *What I would have given you, little man* and I hear bone snap and organs burst as she says it again *Little man, little man* and she crushes me until my world goes flat in black and white and I lose almost all of myself. And now I am no longer a man at all, but the helpless character squirming under your gaze. What is it you see? A puppet cursed to dance when a stranger staring at glowing phosphors types

D ... A ... Π ... C ... E.

Are you satisfied? I hope you've enjoyed your little catharsis at my expense. But what I still don't get is the difference between us. You and I, *dear* reader. Yes, I looked where I wasn't supposed to, and so here I am. But you, you were right at my shoulder when I kissed Kleio and you know you weren't going to avert your eyes if we had fallen into bed. You looked too; what else would you be doing here?

Now I've said something wrong. You're sure that I'm not supposed to act this way. After all, this is just a story somebody wrote. You don't have any part in it, do you? You're not complicit, you're just reading—improving your mind perhaps, or whiling away the idle hour. Well then, here's one last chance to increase your vocabulary.

HUBRIS: WILLFUL BLINDNESS; OVERBEARING PRESUMPTION; ARROGANCE

I know you smiled at one of my jokes. Was that a tingle of fear back there? No matter. You're real and I don't even have a name. All right, then. I'm done, and you can go on.

Go on.

Go on to the next story, damn you!

TO TOUCH ANYTHING WHEN
CH HER EVERYWHERE?

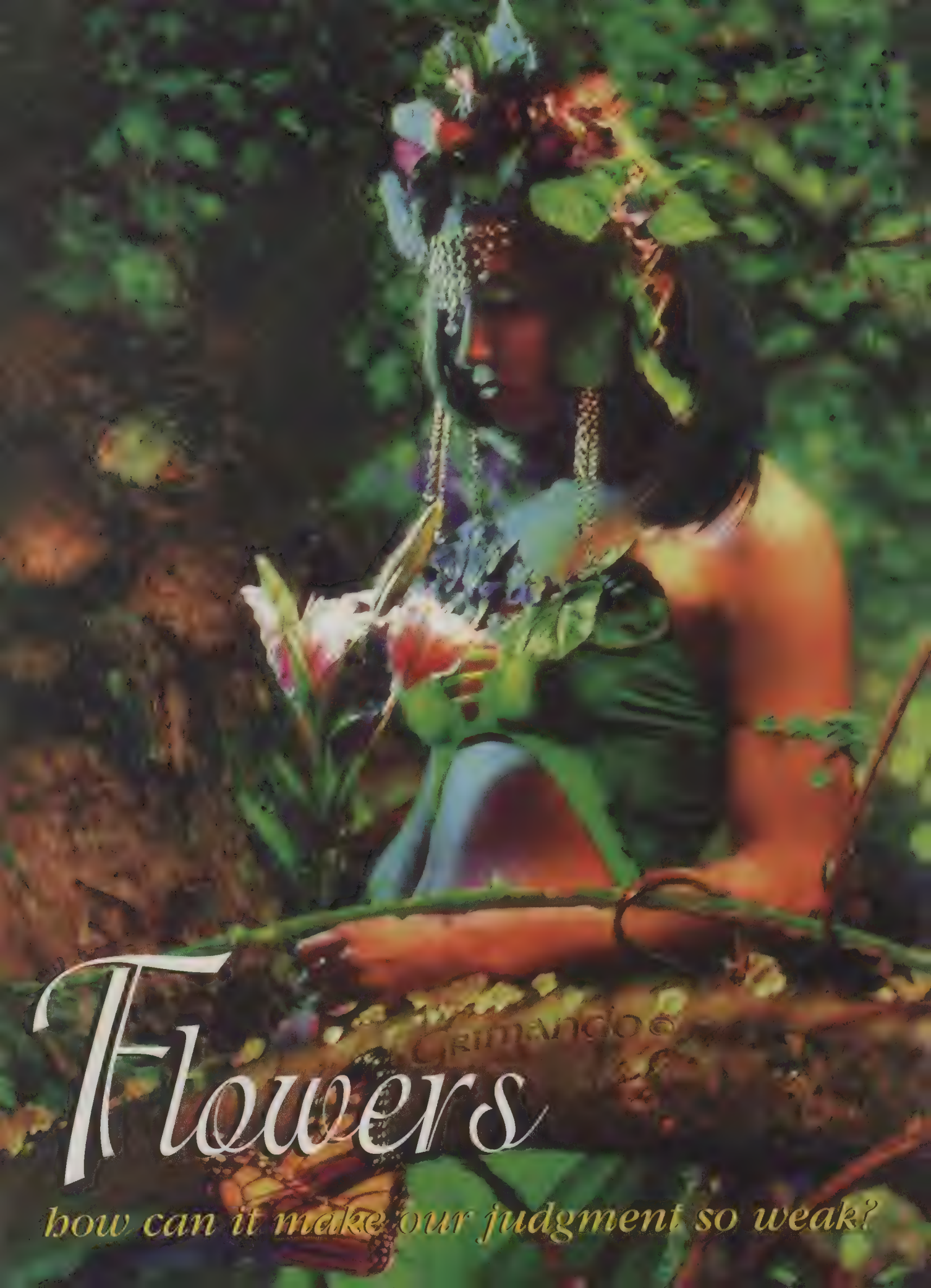
When Jarret rolled away from her, he finally noticed the flowers. "Silly," he murmured against her lips, brushing the fronds of honey-white flowers from her hair. "Lovely." He folded her in his lean, warm arms and rolled them both over. Over then over again. "I love you," he said, crushing her and the flowers together. "I will always love you."

Tamsanne laughed and spun more flowers, more wildness. The honeysuckle crumpled with a smell heady as wine; as he loved her, she him, the power flowed from her body: smoothly, and so free. He had given himself to the moment completely, and there was power in that too, bathing her like the warmth of the sun, binding all together, reinforcing the power of her casting. It was frightening, a little, but Jarret was at her side and she could indulge her strength. "I will always love you too," she said, and clung to him even more fiercely. The flowers burst and cast their dew. She had never known anything so perfect, so true, yet still Jarret loved her.

Honeysuckle

If love makes us strong,

By Katya Reimann
Illustration by Scott Grimando


Flowers
how can it make our judgment so weak?

Afterward, Tamsanne was the first to rise. She reached to touch the fragrant coil. Flexing and turning, it unbound them, burgeoning out new flowers even as it gained release. Jarret lay and watched her while she dressed.

"You're getting stronger," he said. "I feel it whenever we lie together."

Tamsanne did not answer. There was no denying it was true.

"Being with you is like watching the trees across the border—watching the Changing Lands. Everything is alive—even what shouldn't be. Everything is awake—even the trees."

She bent and pressed her fingers to his lips. "The Changing Lands are unlucky," she said. For the people of the border forests, especially so, with their unpredictable wax and wane of power, their sorcerous entrapments. Jarret's words were prettily spoken, but she hoped that was not how he saw her. "And I beg all our gods together that I will never be unlucky to you." Laughing, she glanced down his long body. "Everything is awake? Again? Already? How can that be?"

He kissed her fingers and playfully pushed her away. "Unlucky words indeed," he smiled. "I have spoken further than I can act."

She pulled her dress on over her head and began to comb out her long, dark hair. "I want it to be like this always. I want always to be with you."

"There's more in the world than I can offer you," Jarret said seriously. He grinned. "And I am not a modest man."

"The world can wait," she told him.

Jarret inclined his head. "I understand the world has made you an offer. I hear that more has come to our little village than a bored party of noblemen looking for good hunting."

She wrinkled her nose. "The Princess's dispatch to Meralyse." That was supposed to be secret. "How did you hear?"

"The men talked. They gave me to understand that her Highness's consort came down to this neck of the woods to seek a quarry other than our fat red deer."

Tamsanne shook her head, impatient. The inhabitants of their tiny border village liked nothing better than to mind their neighbors' business. "Did they tell you all? No? Old Princess Lousielle wants Meralyse to send a hedge-witch to court to make flowers for her daughter's wedding. Flowers for next summer. Have you ever heard of any such thing?"

"A whole year apart." As she stood to shake her skirts out, he reached and touched the bare skin of her leg. "What will you say to your Aunt?"

"I haven't decided yet," she said. "Meralyse speaks of my duty. But I am still young. There are others who could make flowers for a wedding. Why should it be me?"

He sat, covering his nakedness with the loose bundle of his clothes. Sun glinted off the fine reddish hair on his body as he bent to pick up his boots. "You are strong," he said, fiddling with the laces.

"I will be stronger," she answered. It pained her to look upon his beauty, his long graceful limbs, his sun-filled handsomeness. She was a dark little wren at his side. Plain, neat, and homespun—and yet he loved her.

She did not want to think of the offer that had come to her through Meralyse. Just now, the desire was not in her to leave Arleon Forest. The invasion of their tiny hameau by the Prince Consort's hunting party had been an unpleasant event in itself. A poor end to an unsettled summer. The farmers had joked—bitterly—that the gods had turned against them, sending Roger Mansvelt and his entourage their way. And now this. A court appointment in a distant city, to a Princess rumored to be a shadow in her shining consort's wake.

There was little inducement to leave her current life, whatever Meralyse's admonishments. "I'm stronger when I am with you," she told him.

He laughed and stood, the honeysuckle coils falling away. "That's not true," he said, "and we both know it. I never had mothers and grandmothers who knew the great goddesses' words. The power is in you whether I'm here or not."

"I don't care. Why should the Princess or the capital need me? From her dispatch it's not clear even if she needs a sorceress or an entertainer. Flowers for a wedding that's more than a year away. Why would she need a witch for that?"

"You can do much more than make flowers," Jarret said, untangling a honeysuckle tendril from his hair as he borrowed the comb to rebraid his queue. "Why would a Princess commit to paper every service that she needs?"

"It makes no difference," Tamsanne replied. "I'm not ready to leave here yet."

"That's no answer to give a Princess." Jarret picked up the long hunter's cloak where they'd been lying, shook the crushed flowers out of its folds, and turned it bright-side out. "Or even a Princess's consort."

"Roger Mansvelt is a pig."

Jarret shrugged. "He is husband to our sovereign sworn, and it is Princess Lousielle who keeps Tielmark's god-pledges, not her consort." Slipping the cloak around his shoulders, he busied himself stowing his tracker's gear, preparing for his night's work as Sieur Roger's guide.

Tamsanne watched him, not satisfied that she had gained her point. "She is too weak even to keep her man discreet." The consort's entourage included a fine lady, a dark woman with sallow skin and velvet dresses. The court folk had made no attempt to hide this woman's intimate relations with Sieur Roger, much to the border folk's bemusement. Gries Hameau, their village, had been uncertain whether to feel relief that their women were safe, or insult that a consort who rovèd would not consider them worthy. Tamsanne herself, flush with her love for Jarret, had felt only disgust.

"That may be so," Jarret agreed. "But we are sworn still to serve her—and through her, him."

"Why are you going with him tonight?" she complained, almost wishing that he would argue. "You've already given him more than a week of good hunting."

"No choice in it. The other chasseurs will give his entourage an excellent hunt, but they'll beggar the forest stock for the season. With me, the Consort's party will run a better chase and take a lighter cull,

"Spare me false softness. I'd love you still if you vined us with roses and thorns. Or nothing at all."

and the hameau will have meat enough to put by come winter." He buckled on his knife belt, staring at the clasp as he notched it. "Neither the consort nor his men care if they deplete our woods. For them, the hunting is good wherever they may tarry." Which would be as close as Jarret would ever come to admitting that he disliked the work.

She clutched handfuls of his cloak when she hugged him, wishing he would let her brighten its color to buttercup brilliance, safeguarding him against carelessly loosed arrows. "Goddess Elianté save us, at least one of us knows his duty." Seeing him so thoughtful and sad, she wanted to lighten his mood. "The other is learning. If that wasn't true the Princess's messenger would already have his answer."

Finishing his accoutrements, his fingers twisted the sprig of honeysuckle he'd pulled from his hair. "It's never so sweet when I run by it in the woods," he said, tucking it into his sleeve. "And never so tender-boughed, when I'm tangling through it on a hare's tail!"

"It will always be soft and sweet where it makes us a bower," Tamsanne assured him. "I want nothing but beauty by us when we come to share."

"Spare me false softness," he said. "I'd love you still if you vined us with roses and thorns. Or nothing at all. To hold you in my arms is my truest delight—"

"Roses are a courtier's flower," Tamsanne interrupted. Hearing him talk this sweetly was a pleasure so intense it bordered on pain. "And I am just a simple hedge-witch, guarding Tielmark's southern border."

"Simple?" Jarret grinned and reached for her hand. "Never."

The hunt departed from Gries Hameau on foot, a little before dusk. The Prince Consort had a fancy to learn a huntsman's trade. Or so he had told the master huntsman he'd brought with him from the capital. Tamsanne—along with most of the hameau's other folk—stood on the top of the knoll by the edge of the clustered cottages, watching the gaily-clad mob that was the Prince Consort and his entourage as they strode merrily into the greenwood and the setting sun's last light.

"They'll never catch anything with that noisy crowd," one man snickered. "However fancy their slings and arrows."

"Our chasseurs will find them game," someone else piped up, though speaking not in disagreement. "But our Princess's pretty man will have to stop preening and shoot, if he wants to bring it home."

Tamsanne, not wanting to watch as Jarret slipped from sight, studied the sheltered paddock where Sieur Roger and his men had made camp. In accordance with Tielmark's god-pledges, the Princess's consort had been born a common man, a soldier, but it was obvious from Sieur Roger's trappings that he did not intend to die one. The brightly colored tent that served as his field lodgings was extravagantly embroidered with hunting images: white hares, red deer, and boars of every color.

"Jarret will see that he comes home with quarry." One of the farmers stuck with supplying the entourage echoed Tamsanne's thoughts aloud. "Better still, he'll keep them clear of my rye."

"How long before they tire of our thin fields?" Fat Desery, the farmer who was nearest neighbor to Tamsanne's forest cottage, shot the young witch a speaking look. "When's Meralyse going to give them an answer?"

"What does that have to do with anything?" Tamsanne said acidly. "The Princess's consort is here to hunt, not to wait on Meralyse. They'll get bored and leave soon enough, whether or not they have her answer."

"They're bored now," Desery said. "If Meralyse gave the word, they'd be gone tomorrow, and out of our fields for good."

"Then my beloved aunt should speak with someone who can give her a quicker answer. I'm not the only woman in these woods who could put flowers on a lady's tables."

"You're the best we have," the fat farmer pressed. "Meralyse won't send the Princess anyone but the best."

Tamsanne would have answered, but the arrival of the woman herself broke up the conversation. Tall and strongly built, with a crown of pale blonde braids, Meralyse's innate authority sent all but Tamsanne hurrying about their own affairs, leaving the older witch and her niece alone. "Tamsanne." Meralyse put her hand on the younger woman's shoulder, drawing her away from the knoll's crest. "I looked for you earlier, but you were nowhere to be found."

Tamsanne, pleased to be rescued from a disagreeable conversation but annoyed that Meralyse had caught up with her at last, deflected her aunt's implicit question. "Sieur Roger has a new plan tonight," she said. "Instead of drinking the night through with his doxie, he's gone to stumble about in the woods. They say he'll be out to day-break, but I'd warrant he'll tire sooner than that."

Her aunt raised a brow. "Does it occur to you, Tamsanne, that the farmers may be right when they say that Sieur Roger endangers more than their fields?"

"What's that to me?" Tamsanne replied. "They'll worry still more come winter if I'm not here to find them plants, or when some sorcery from the Changing Lands comes stalking, and I'm not here to help send it back." She glanced at Meralyse fretfully. "Why put this on my shoulders? All the Princess needs for her daughter's wedding is a hedge-witch with a talent for making green things. Of all of those who could play that game, why would she need me? I don't want to leave Gries right now—for many reasons. Why won't you accept that?"

"Because you are not my Princess. Because Lousielle's dispatch charged me to send her the strongest witch in Arleon Forest." Meralyse glanced back at the knoll to ensure that no one was within earshot. "And that is no longer me. It's not for us to question why the Princess wants a strong witch for a seemingly unimportant task. But I'm sure she would not ask such a thing lightly."

"I'm not," Tamsanne said. "Consider her consort's behavior. He's turned the poor hameau upside-down seeking his own pleasure. Half the harvest of our winter tables is gone, squandered for a fortnight's sport. Do you really believe that he's so dull-witted he doesn't know what he's doing?"

"Roger Mansvelt is not our Princess," Meralyse said sternly. "We do not owe him the pledge that we owe Lousielle. Unlike Lousielle, the rightness of Sieur Roger's life does not put crops on our tables, or young in the bellies of our animals. Our loyalty must be to *her*. A young princess's wedding … in Tielmark, that is no small thing. If Lousielle has chosen wrongly for her daughter—if she fails to please the gods, to uphold the god-pledges—"

Tamsanne shook her head. "If old Lousielle has chosen wrongly, how could I, called to make flowers, put that to rights? I can't leave Gries right now. The border is too unsettled, and besides—" she glanced away, shy, and then, bracing herself, looked back to meet Meralyse's gaze, defiant. "I can't go. I'm learning too much. Every time I'm with Jarret, I am stronger. To leave that, just to make flowers—"

"That strength is *you*, not Jarret," Meralyse said angrily.

"Perhaps so, but Jarret is teaching me!"

"You could learn without him!"

"I don't want to."

Meralyse pressed a hand to her forehead, struggling to moderate her tone. "Tamsanne," she said. "I see now that I have gone about this wrongly, but I cannot take my words back.

"So think on this. The Consort is bored already. Here at Tielmark's South Border we have little entertainment to offer him. There has been talk around the campfires. Where do you suppose he will want Jarret to lead him next, for novelties to divert him?"

"Home to court," Tamsanne said impatiently. "How should I know?"

"Roger Mansvelt wants to see the Changing Lands," Meralyse told her. "And they say he'll be wanting your Jarret to take him."

Tamsanne stood, panting, at the center of the glade. Overhead, bright stars filled a sky palely tinted with the swift dwindling light of day; around her, the forest shadows were lengthening.

She threw off her shoes, scared and impatient, and dug her toes into the moss. There was no time to lose, preparing the ritual, no time to quiet her pounding heart. She had begun to run the moment she'd escaped from Meralyse. She had not wanted to give her aunt the advantage of knowing how badly her words had frightened her.

Eyes closed, she called out to Tielmark's twin goddesses for their guidance: Emiera the merciful lady, Elianté the pitiless huntress. Her anger with Meralyse, her fear for Jarret, slowed her call, crippled her focus. Realization of that truth was little help to her. If she wanted to call the magic, to achieve the grounding, she had no choice but to soothe herself. But—

But she could not believe the Princess's consort was such a stupid man. How could he be alive, and still so stupid? The danger Jarret faced cut her like a physical pain.

The magic—it would not rise. Tangled fear and rage had blocked her. She would have to calm herself before she called the spell. Conceding self-defeat, she tore her feet from the moss and began to pace.

In the borderlands, everyone knew the danger. This past summer had been particularly bad, with an unexpected surge of snares and the disappearance of some valuable cattle. There had been whispers of two women lost, in the villages north to Gries, though nothing had been substantiated. In the Changing Lands, the land, the trees, were always hungry, always seeking human prey. The ungoverned magic of those lands was strong enough to steal and bind a human soul—a thousand souls—to feed the hunger of the trees, and the trees were never sated.

Against this threat, distance was the only certain shield. It was true that the border river, the Great Rush, provided a measure of protection, but its waters were tainted by lures and uncertainty. There were eddies of magic and unexpected snags. Rafts of mauve and white lilies trawled the water's surface, rife with stupefying perfume. It was easy to drown while lily-poisoned—but that was not the worst threat. The worst was being trapped by a current of power and being taken over the water.

No one who crossed over ever came back.

She shook herself. Jarret was no fool. He would not risk the Consort's life to any such foolish daring. He would bring the Princess's husband home safe—however unworthy Sieur Roger might be of his care.

Drawing a deep breath, she went back to the place where she had split the moss with her feet.

The strongest witch in Arleon Forest, Meralyse had said, *and that is no longer me.*

At last the familiar spiral began unfolding. Her feet locked into the earth, and her mind moved outward, tracing deep roots in the soil. Here the ivy she had nestled beneath the tall elm her grandmother had planted, there the deep oaken root started by some impossibly remote ancestral aunt. In the widening gyre, she felt first for her own seedlings, tucked safely among the roots of older trees, and then for the plants that had been started by her elders, generations back. Meralyse's hand she felt, time and time again, familiar and powerful in its support, even if a little unbalancing. Less often the warmth of her own mother touched her, Anna whose skill had remained latent, even as she had planted for her daughter and those as yet unborn.

For a time Tamsanne lost herself in the matrix. There was always some new finding, some new discovery. Meralyse had spoken sometimes of how she saw the forest. She described a river gaining toward flood, gaining until it overwhelmed her and she had to pull away, lest she be lost within power of the stream.

For Tamsanne, it was not like that. It was like staring into the sky at night. The longer she stared, the more stars she could see. Meralyse had gone very quiet when Tamsanne had told her that—a telling that had come long before she and Jarret had ever shared their troth.

Tamsanne wondered what Meralyse would say if she tried to describe what she saw now. The forest was a great blaze of light, with herself projected into every green thing from the shy newness of soft grass rising through to the grandeur of the oldest oak, suspended between life and death. She had started to feel the flickers of larger shapes, of deeper tides of power. She could not talk of this to Meralyse, but now as she searched outward, seeking her beloved, sparks of green fire effervesced at the corners of her vision, elusive swirls of power that seemed to trace a great chain-like shape. She could never look on this directly, but over time it had become more and more clear to her, more solid. In her less humble moments, she imagined it might be the great bond laid by the goddess twins to keep the border, but she still was not sure—unlike the enticing golden lights that episodically came vining across it, as if seeking a stranglehold. Those—those she knew were the magic of the Changing Lands, looking for a place to root on this side of the border. That she did not need to question, having so often resisted its lures and pulled it up, sending it scuttling back south—at no little cost to herself.

On a river bluff high over the water, she finally found Jarret. She found him and she smiled, well knowing the place. It was tangled over with honeysuckle now, a snug ledge that was also a promontory, giving a vast open view of the land that lay so close, and yet so safely far, across a broad ox-bow of the river. She had visited the place numerous times, both with Jarret and alone.

The tall chasseur stood by himself at the side of the hunting party, his hand teasing a tendril of soft, horn-shaped honeysuckle buds, waiting, self-collected and apart, for Sieur Roger's next command.

She would have opened the flowers for him, but that would have been an intrusion.

She tried to picture in her mind's eye the far land that lay before him. Night fog on the water would shroud the curving hills. Through that mist, glinting motes of light would flicker, half-unseen movement that was the dryad-kind—the bodies of those who had lost their souls—dancing beneath the tangled trees.

He was clever. He was safe. No snares from the distant land could reach him on that overlook.

She drew back into herself with a pang of guilt.

Meralyse had made it difficult for her to trust.

A week had passed. There was much grumbling in the hameau. Some sided with Meralyse, but more sided with Tamsanne now. People muttered, as they thought, behind the witches' backs, that Meralyse should send her own daughter Joia and have done.

Jarret and Tamsanne spun more honeysuckle, though less wildly. The tall hunter was tiring. He needed rest.

Another week passed, another day. Jarret was gone with the Consort's entourage, seeking wildfowl. As day drew toward evening, the camp-soldier who had carried the Princess's dispatch to Meralyse sought Tamsanne out, even in her own home.

He was an older man, distinguished and cool. He walked with a permanent limp, favoring an old rider's injury. The path to her father's house, and farther to Tamsanne's hut, was a long one. In respect for his age and his infirmity, Tamsanne welcomed him to the deep chair near her small hearth and offered him refreshment. But it did not please her that he had come.

"Why are you here?" she asked, when he had finished his barley beer.

"In the hameau, they speak highly of your skill. They say Mera-lyse has passed much to you that she could not give to her daughter." His eyes flickered to the worn but beautifully carved

cabinet that stood on the shelf over Tamsanne's narrow bed.

"It is so," Tamsanne said, disgusted that the people had said so much.

"They say you can tell fortunes."

"I can, but I don't." She gave him a sharp look. "Does the Princess want a fortune-teller as well as a flower-maker?"

He shook his head. "She is wise enough to know her fate."

"Indeed?" Tamsanne said. She wished the old man would take his crippled hip and wander back down her path, out of her life. "She is among the fortunate few."

"She is in need of a powerful witch."

"For her daughter's flowers." Tamsanne scoffed. "I know. Meralyse has told me."

"For her flowers," the man agreed softly. "For her daughter's flowers." He set down the mug, folded his arms, and regarded her very seriously. "Why won't you help her?"

Tamsanne shot him a cool look. Having accepted her refreshment, he should not have set her such a question. "Does Lousielle know so little of her own border's troubles? The Changing Lands are no mild quiescent force. This summer has been a hard one, and things promise to get worse. Without my words to the trees, who knows how long the farmers of Gries Hameau will keep safely to their fields?"

"It is Lousielle's pledge to the gods that keeps the border safe."

"Poorly," Tamsanne snapped. "And poorer still, if she would take me from it."

"I would argue the reverse," the old man said. Something like anger flashed in him, quickly soothed over with mildness. "If only I thought you would listen."

A moment of awkward silence passed between them. Tamsanne looked pointedly at her visitor's now empty mug, wishing he would finish talking and leave.

"If you already know that I will not listen," she said, exasperated at last to words, "why have you bothered to come?"

"In the hameau, they say that you have Meralyse's Rhasan deck." The old man paused, glancing again at the carved cabinet. "It was because of Meralyse's Rhasan deck that the Princess knew to send to her. Long ago, the Princess's own mother had doings with that particular deck of cards."

Tamsanne went rigid. "Then the Princess is more fool even than her consort. If Lousielle wants a Rhasan-reader for her daughter's wedding, Sieur Roger's imprudence is nothing beside her own. The Rhasan is no parlor game for a wedding day. It's far too dangerous."

The Rhasan's magic was ancient, predating the rule of the Princes of Tielmark, predating even the rule of the empire that had preceded Tielmark's princes, going back to the days of the wandering tribes. Some said that it was older even than the high gods, that it ruled even the Great Twelve's fate.

The cards could reveal a human's soul and transform its future. The Princess was a fool indeed if she thought to secure a Rhasan-reader for her daughter's wedding, particularly if she wanted that reader to make use of Tamsanne's deck.

"You mistake me," the Princess's man said. "But time is growing short, and Sieur Roger will leave without the Princess's hedge-witch if Meralyse makes him bide here any longer."

"What do you want?" Tamsanne asked.

"I have written something here on this scrip." The man produced a folded paper from his sleeve. "Something the Princess told me to write, were I driven to this end.

"I am going to get up and leave you now." He stretched his hip, then bent and set the scrip on the clay tile where he had already placed his empty mug. "After I leave, ask your cards what will become of Tielmark—of the Princess Lousielle—if Meralyse does not send her the most powerful hedge-witch in Arleon Forest. The hedge-witch to magic her daughter's wedding flowers. Then look at the scrip."

"And if I refuse?" Tamsanne said.

"Humor an old man," he said. He walked stiffly to the doorway. "Leave your decision until I am gone, and I will never know."

The scrip lay on the tile for more than an hour. Tamsanne busied herself, in and out of the cottage, trying to decide what to do. She could throw the scrip in the fire, unread. She could read it, and leave the Rhasan deck untouched. Either way, the old man would live in ignorance.

Outside her door, the light faded among the trees. Soon Jarret would be joining her.

When she opened the cabinet, she thought she had already made her choice. The Rhasan cards, safeguarded in their bone coffer, should have been resting on the middle of the cabinet's three shelves, each of which was blessed and cursed and carved from a different variety of wood.

But when she opened the cabinet, the coffer was open. The deck, usually ritually stored face down, faced up to her, a card staring up at her from the bottom of the deck. Tamsanne slammed the cabinet doors shut, but not in time.

It was the penultimate card of the Rhasan, and very unlucky.

Eyes closed, she reopened the cabinet and fumbled for the cards. "It did not invoke," she said feverishly. She could tell from the texture which side of the cards was up. "It did not invoke," she repeated, praying. She shuffled the cards, cut the deck, and shuffled again, whispering the covenant that went with a true-telling. "Let me see," she said aloud, pulling the top card and holding it up. Her eyes were still squeezed tightly shut. "Let me face the truth."

The parchment of the drawn card was brittle between her fingers. She pictured its back in her mind's eye: crude, printed with coarse red and black ink. Except for their great age, the cards looked like something a drover might use, at the end of a long night's drinking.

She opened her eyes, reversed the card, and flinched. The image before her inexorably overlaid itself on the picture already graven behind her lids from that first unlucky glimpse, refreshing it. Two bound men: Beleaguer, writhing in revolt even as the rack crushed him; Demstar, passive beneath the whip, sowing his seed on barren earth. *The Slaves.* Power crushed to another's power; despair, death, and the promise of worse punishments. *The Slaves.*

She could shuffle the cards, and reshuffle them again, but she would never escape that card. It was horrible. In answer to the broad

Sparks of green fire effervesced at the corners of her vision, elusive swirls of power that seemed to trace a great chain-like shape.

question the old man had set her, there was almost no limit to the doom it foretold. She shrank down, overwhelmed by the consequences of the Princess's heedless act. To risk this, Princess Lousielle could only be stupid, ignorant, a trifler. Tamsanne—Tamsanne had no such excuse.

Tamsanne shuffled the card back into the deck and mouthed the quieting rituals. Hands quivering, she returned the cards to the coffer with what reverence she could muster, and banged the cabinet doors shut. This was a disaster. What had she allowed herself to be tempted to have done?

Seeking something, anything, to soften her act of lunacy, she grabbed for the old man's scrip and folded it open.

The scrip was blank, save for a single number, written in red ink.

Twenty-three.

It was the number of *The Slaves,* of their place in the Rhasan.

The Princess had not asked Tamsanne to form Tielmark's future, in the event she did not get the right hedge-witch to manage the flowers for her daughter's wedding. The Princess had already known.

By the time she reached the hameau, the stars were out. She could see lights in Sieur Roger's camp. The embroideries of the Consort's tent were backlit, showing dark silhouettes of beasts against the thinner, unworked cloth. The hunting party was back.

"Tamsanne!" Fat Desery came jogging toward her. "Where is Meralyse?"

"I don't know," she said. "Where is Jarret? He and I need to talk."

Desery's mouth fell open. No sound came out. She knew at once from the pain in his face what had happened. The blood went cold in her body, but she forced herself to speak.

"Where? Where did he go over?"

Desery opened his hands unhappily. "Truly, Tamsanne, I do not think it was Sieur Roger's fault. To him, testing the border was a game. He did not understand the true danger of the snares, the traps—"

"Gods in me, do you think I care!" She was near to howling. "Where was Jarret lost?"

"Stadler's Reef," he told her reluctantly. "They were hunting ducks there, in the reeds at the river's edge."

"When you see Meralyse, tell her that's where I'm going."

"But why?"

"Because," Tamsanne whispered. She turned and spread her hands to the trees beyond the safe, firelit edge of the hameau. "Because I am going to cross the river, and I'm going to bring him back."

Cloying mud coated the river's bottom where she swam to shore. She waded in past a raft of lilies, their buds tightly furled with the touch of night cold, and climbed up onto the bank.

The ground beyond, where it faded from sight under the trees, was a mass of low green. Not quite moss, but similar. Tamsanne walked proudly forward, set her feet, and tried to bring herself to ground.

A great naked nothingness rose to meet her. The shock of her missing roots hit like a wave. Involuntarily she half-turned and cast a longing glance to the far shore, to Arleon Forest. Then, steeling herself, she banished the distraction.

It did not matter if she could feel the deep roots here, swooping to repel, like territorial crows that spied a raptor high above them. It did not matter if she could feel the tiny plants, pushing her away with rootlets that were tinier still. It did not matter if she was alone. She was strong. She did not need the support of the green things around her. She did not need their permission. She thrust everything imperiously aside and sent her mind spinning outward, searching.

It did not take her long. The honeysuckle from Jarret's sleeve leapt to her like a star. She tore her feet from the earth and ran toward it, uncaring as trees and brush thrashed against her. If the whole forest was against her, she did not care, if only she was not too late—

She heard before she saw. Dryad song, sweet and tremulous, reached her through the trees. She had not known that she could move faster, but somehow she found a way. Breath burning in her throat, she burst from among the brush into a shadowed glade, surrounded on all sides by high, thick-trunked trees.

The foliage shifted colors, paling to spring-like greens then darkening through to muddy forest black.

Pale shapes danced beneath the shifting canopy of branches. Attenuated shapes, with flowing hair and naked skin. Dryad-kind. Bodies without souls.

"Get away from him!" Tamsanne shouted.

They turned to her with beautiful mocking faces. Four clustered by the dense roots of a great hardwood. Clustered, and held something—someone—tightly against the earth.

"Get away from him!" she repeated. When they did not respond, she advanced and spoke the first word of Power. That got their attention. They scattered like leaves in the wind, except for the four holding Jarret.

She spoke the second word of Power, and even those four scuttled away.

"Jarret," she said, and ran to kneel by him. "Jarret, my only love."

His eyes moved for a moment beneath the delicate lids, then opened. "You came for me," he breathed. "I knew you would."

She stared down. In his struggle with the dryads, the sprig of honeysuckle had fallen from his sleeve and touched earth. That was how she had traced him. Not his conscious call. Bitter revelation filled her. He was already gone—or almost gone, given that he could still remember her. "Yes, I came." She bent to kiss his lips. His lean beautiful arms enfolded her. She could feel the change already, but something of him was still there. "I came," she said, gentle against his rich hair. As she spoke, her fingers reached to touch the honeysuckle where it had fallen, and she pressed its broken stem into the soil. "I love you," she told Jarret, and spun the honeysuckle one last time.

The moment of his pleasure came quickly. The new honeysuckle was a haze between them, soft green tendrils heavy with sweet-smelling trumpets, pristine white. He scarcely noticed the moment she withdrew, unwinding from the tangle and sprawling clumsily back.

"Still protecting him?"

She turned. The woodman who spoke was different than the pretty sprites who'd held Jarret down. His skin was dark, velvety green, and his hair was corded vines tangled with laurel.

Jarret's future. She found the man physically beautiful, despite the

alien green. This was what Jarret would become.

"I will always protect him," she told the woodman. "He is my heart."

"You would have done better to look to yourself," the woodman said, glancing past her shoulder. She wondered what force had gathered there, beyond Jarret's entangled body, among the trees. "Do you think to hold him, with your bonds of vine and flower?"

"You have all of him that you will ever take," Tamsanne said evenly. "I have all that I will keep. Be wise, and hold yourselves content with that."

The woodman held out gnarled hands, their backs textured like bark. "You have daunted our magic many times, grounded in your own soil. Now that you have come to us, you will not be going back. On this side of the river, the god-pledge that keeps your border safe will not protect you."

Tamsanne stared into the depths of the woodman's forest eyes. There was no humanity there. Instead there were great shapes. Great shapes which Tamsanne could watch and comprehend, but which the man himself would never understand. It took her breath away, to stand before him so, seeing all that had heretofore remained hidden. "I would argue the reverse," she found herself saying, in echo of the Princess's man. "If only I thought you would listen." Of course the Princess needed her. Through Roger Mansvelt's infidelities, the god-pledge had been weakened, allowing the Changing Lands their encroachments. If Lousielle's daughter was to make a successful wedding, redeeming the pledge's strength, the old Princess would need one such as Tamsanne by her, helping to reforge those bonds.

The woodman, shorn of soul, no longer understanding matters of loyalty and the human heart, shook his head, puzzled. "Your man was our road to making you come over. That is the end of it."

"You have made a mistake," Tamsanne told him. "I have business still in my own country, and you have mistaken me."

"I think not," the woodman answered. "You will be staying here."

"It is your nature to believe that," Tamsanne stared into the depths of his forest eyes, preparing herself to counter him. The man was oak. Old oak. Her naked toes curled against the turf. "I hold no bitterness against you for it."

When he would have spoke again, she spread her hands, released a wave of force, and spoke aloud the third word.

An oak by the side of the glade screamed and splintered into blood-red tinder, as savagely as if it had been struck by lightning. Its broad canopy crashed down, ripping branches. The woodman screamed, unintelligible, and fell in his turn to the earth.

She spun around. There were more woodmen behind her, as strong and varied as the trees. It did not matter. She spoke again and destroyed another oak. Branches whipped in a cacophony overhead, as the wakened trees realized their peril. The rank of woodmen fell back.

She strode forward, a storm passing among the great timbers. *Jarret was gone*, her heart sang to her, swollen with sorrow and wrath. *Jarret was gone.*

She barely knew when she reached the river. It was dawn, and a raft of opened lilies awaited. She gazed down into the field of mauve and white, sensed the first draught of sleep-making perfume. Self-pity that she could not indulge welled up within her.

What did it matter if the Changing Lands took her? What did it matter, now that Jarret was gone?

When she awoke, Meralyse's face was above her. "Tamsanne," she said. "I saw you on the far bank. You fell into the water. Into the flowers." She clasped Tamsanne's fingers in her own. "I brought the raft here. But you were in the water, in the flowers so long...."

Tamsanne rolled feebly on her side, feeling ill. "I'm all right."

"You escaped." Meralyse's voice was reverent. "Tamsanne, no one has ever escaped."

"It doesn't matter," Tamsanne said. "No one will ever know but you and me." Crushed reeds brushed her cheek, the pillow where she lay. With an effort, the young witch struggled clumsily upright. Meralyse had pulled her up no more than yards from the point where she had first entered the water, at the edge of the wide, reed-filled cove where Sieur Roger had had his day of hunting ducks.

Her aunt had covered her with a coarse woolen cloak. Reminded of Jarret's smooth hunting cloth, Tamsanne pushed it impatiently down. What was left of her shift was torn to rags, rags over swathes of bleeding, branch-whipped skin.

The older witch handed over her dress and cote and helped her fumble into them. Neither made a move to bathe her in the tainted flow of the Great Rush. Meralyse asked no questions about Jarret. When Tamsanne had finished dressing, they sat closely together for a time, staring at the far shore.

Under the pale dawn light, the Changing Lands were quivering toward their day-state. The trees shivered, their leaves unfolding, ever-changing. The foliage shifted colors, paling to spring-like greens, then darkening through to muddy forest black. Occasionally there would be a pause, as in a conversation; then the motion would start rebuilding.

After a long time Meralyse turned her back to Tamsanne and stared off downstream. Her shoulders were bent and tired. Tamsanne noticed a new grayness to the pale blonde of her hair. "The men say Sieur Roger will leave today with his best men," Meralyse said. "The rest will remain behind only to break up his camp."

"His business here is done," Tamsanne said, grateful that her aunt spared her at this moment. "Why should he not go?"

"I will send Joia with him."

Tamsanne stared numbly at the changing forest across the river. Among the bright branches, something silver glinted, a light or a flicker of white fire. *Would her honeysuckle stay rooted?* she wondered. *Or would it die and merge into the earth?*

"Send Joia?" she asked, rousing as the meaning of Meralyse's words filtered through. "What are you saying? I myself will go to Princeport to serve as Lousielle's flower-maker."

Meralyse's strong face went white with relief. "But you want to stay here."

"You said it yourself," Tamsanne rose, chilled and beginning to feel the glimmers of her body's pain. She pushed long tendrils of her lank, dark hair back from her face, conscious suddenly of her bedraggle ment. "You have been charged to send the Princess Arleon Forest's strongest witch. There can be no question but that means me."

"Then we must return to Gries at once," Meralyse sprang up. "I will not set you on the road unprepared." Glancing down, she paused, then fumbled in the pouch at her waist. "You will have to take my shoes."

Tamsanne looked at her feet. From her ankles downward, the skin was dark, twisted like bark. Blood clotted thickly along the jagged lines where her body force had entered the earth. "Of course," she said faintly, averting her eyes. "All that you think is best."

It took greater fortitude than Tamsanne had envisioned to walk the trail back to the hameau. Her feet's numbness did not last long, and Meralyse was loath to dose her with potations that might have fogged her mind. She felt a heightened sensitivity to every plant she passed as they made their way through the forest—Meralyse's oak, her own ivy, her mother's and grandmothers' verdure. Now that she had agreed to leave them, it seemed she did not need to feel their roots to sense their growth.

"I am sure you will learn to serve our Princess well," Meralyse whispered, on the last stretch of path before they entered Gries.

"Have no doubt of that," Tamsanne said. Up ahead, she caught sight of Sieur Roger and the core of his entourage, magnificent in their embroidered hunting coats.

She met Meralyse's eyes, and forced herself to smile.

"I learn every lesson well." ❧

The Rose in Twelve Petals

We all know how the story of
the princess in the tower comes out, don't we?
We know it as well as we know the minds of our children,
path of our future, the fate of our world.

I. *The Witch*

This rose has 12 petals. Let the first one fall: Madeleine taps the glass bottle, and out tumbles a bit of pink silk that clinks on the table—a chip of tinted glass—no, look closer, a crystallized rose petal. She lifts it into a saucer and crushes it with the back of a spoon until it is reduced to lumpy powder and a puff of fragrance.

She looks at the book again. "Petal of one rose crushed, dung of small bat soaked in vinegar." Not enough light comes through the cottage's small-paned windows, and besides she is growing nearsighted, although she is only 32. She leans closer to the page. He should have given her spectacles rather than pearls. She wrinkles her forehead to focus her eyes, which makes her look prematurely old, as in a few years she no doubt will be.

By Theodora Goss
Illustration by Stephen Johnson

Bat dung has a dank, uncomfortable smell, like earth in caves that has never seen sunlight.

Can she trust it, this book? Two pounds 10 shillings it cost her, including postage. She remembers the notice in *The Gentlewoman's Companion*: "Every lady her own magician. Confound your enemies, astonish your friends! As simple as a cookery manual." It looks magical enough, with *Compendium Magicarum* stamped on its spine and gilt pentagrams on its red leather cover. But the back pages advertise "a most miraculous lotion that will make any lady's skin as smooth as an infant's bottom" and the collected works of Scott.

Not easy to spare 10 shillings, not to mention two pounds, now that the King has cut off her income. Rather lucky, this cottage coming so cheap, although it has no proper plumbing, just a privy out back among the honeysuckle.

Madeleine crumbles a pair of dragonfly wings into the bowl, which is already half full: orris root; cat's bones found on the village dust heap; oak gall from a branch fallen into a fairy ring; madder, presumably for its color; crushed rose petal; bat dung.

And the magical words, are they quite correct? She knows a little Latin, learned from her brother. After her mother's death, when her father began spending days in his bedroom with a bottle of beer, she tended the shop, selling flour and printed cloth to the village women, scythes and tobacco to the men, sweets to children on their way to school. When her brother came home, he would sit at the counter beside her, saying his *amo, amas*. The silver cross he earned by taking a Hibernian bayonet in the throat is the only necklace she now wears.

She binds the mixture with water from a hollow stone and her own saliva. Not pleasant this, she was brought up not to spit, but she imagines she is spitting into the King's face that first time when he came into the shop, and leaned on the counter, and smiled through his golden beard. "If I had known there was such a pretty shopkeeper in this village, I would have done my own shopping long ago."

She remembers: buttocks covered with golden hair among folds of white linen, like twin halves of a peach on a napkin. "Come here, Madeleine." The sounds of the palace, horses clopping, pageboys shouting to one another in the early morning air. "You'll never want for anything, haven't I told you that?" A string of pearls, each as large as her smallest fingernail, with a clasp of gold filigree. "Like it? That's Hibernian work, taken in the siege of London." Only later does she notice that between two pearls, the knotted silk is stained with blood.

She leaves the mixture under cheesecloth, to dry overnight.

Madeleine walks into the other room, the only other room of the cottage, and sits at the table that serves as her writing desk. She picks up a tin of throat lozenges. How it rattles. She knows, without opening it, that there are five pearls left, and that after next month's rent there will only be four.

Confound your enemies, she thinks, peering through the inadequate light, and the wrinkles on her forehead make her look prematurely old, as in a few years she certainly will be.

II. *The Queen*

Petals fall from the roses that hang over the stream, Empress Josephine and Gloire de Dijon, which dislike growing so close to the water. This corner of the garden has been planted to resemble a country landscape in miniature: artificial stream with ornamental fish, a pear tree that has never yet bloomed, bluebells that the gardener plants out every spring. This is the Queen's favorite part of the garden, although the roses dislike her as well, with her romantically diaphanous gowns, her lisping voice, her poetry.

Here she comes, reciting Tennyson.

She holds her arms out, allowing her sleeves to drift on the slight breeze, imagining she is Elaine the lovable, floating on a river down to Camelot. Hard, being a lily maid now her belly is swelling.

She remembers her belly reluctantly, not wanting to touch it, unwilling to acknowledge that it exists. Elaine the lily maid had no belly, surely, she thinks, forgetting that Galahad must have been born somehow. (Perhaps he rose out of the lake?) She imagines her belly as a cavern where something is growing in the darkness, something that is not hers, alien and unwelcome.

Only 12 months ago (14, actually, but she is bad at numbers), she was Princess Elizabeth of Hibernia, dressed in pink satin, gossiping about the riding master with her friends, dancing with her brothers through the ruined arches of Westminster Cathedral, and eating too much cake at her 17th birthday party. Now, and she does not want to think about this so it remains at the edges of her mind, where unpleasant things, frogs and slugs, reside, she is a cavern with something growing inside her, something repugnant, something that is not hers, not the lily maid of Astolat's.

She reaches for a rose, an overblown Gloire de Dijon that, in a fit of temper, pierces her finger with its thorns. She cries out, sucks the blood from her finger, and flops down on the bank like a miserable child. The hem of her diaphanous dress begins to absorb the mud at the edge of the water.

III. *The Magician*

Wolfgang Magus places the rose he picked that morning in his buttonhole and looks at his reflection in the glass. He frowns, as his master Herr Doktor Ambrosius would have frowned, at the scarecrow in faded wool with a drooping gray mustache. A sad figure for a court magician.

Gott in Himmel, he says to himself, a childhood habit he has kept from nostalgia, for Wolfgang Magus is a reluctant atheist. He knows it is not God's fault but the King's, who pays him so little. If the King were to pay him, say, another shilling per week—but no, that too he would send to his sister, dying of consumption at a spa in Berne. His mind turns, painfully, from the memory of her face, white and drained, which already haunts him like a ghost.

He picks up a volume of Goethe's poems that he has carefully tied with a bit of pink ribbon and sighs. What sort of present is this for the Princess's christening?

He enters the chapel with shy, stooping movements. It is full, and noisy with court gossip. As he proceeds up the aisle, he is swept by a Duchess's train of peau de soie, poked by a Viscountess's aigrette. The sword of a Marquis smelling of Napoleon-water tangles in his legs, and he almost falls on a Baroness, who stares at him through her lorgnette. He sidles through the crush until he comes to a corner of the chapel wall, where he takes refuge.

The christening has begun, he supposes, for he can hear the Archbishop droning in bad Latin, although he can see nothing from his corner but taxidermed birds and heads slick with macassar oil. Ah, if the Archbishop could have learned from Herr Doktor Ambrosius! His mind wanders, as it often does, to a house in Berlin and a laboratory smelling of strong soap, filled with braziers and alembics, books whose covers have been half-eaten by moths, a stuffed basilisk. He remembers his bed in the attic, and his sister, who worked as the Herr Doktor's housemaid so he could learn to be a magician. He sees her face on her pillow at the spa in Berne and thinks of her expensive medications.

What has he missed? The crowd is moving forward, and presents are being given: a rocking horse with a red leather saddle, a silver tumbler, a cap embroidered by the nuns of Iona. He hides the volume of Goethe behind his back.

Suddenly, he sees a face he recognizes. One day she came and sat beside him in the garden and asked about his sister. Her brother had died, he remembers, not long before, and as he described his loneliness, her eyes glazed over with tears. Even he, who understands little about court politics, knew she was the King's mistress.

She disappears behind the scented Marquis, then appears again, close to the altar where the Queen, awkwardly holding a linen bundle, is receiving the Princess's presents. The King has seen her, and frowns through his golden beard. Wolfgang Magus, who knows nothing about the feelings of a king toward his former mistress, wonders why he is angry.

She lifts her hand in a gesture that reminds him of the Archbishop. What fragrance is this, so sweet, so dark, that makes the brain clear, that makes the nostrils water? He instinctively tabulates: orris root, oak gall, rose petal, dung of bat with a hint of vinegar.

Conversations hush, until even the Baronets, clustered in a rustic clump at the back of the chapel, are silent.

She speaks: "This is the gift I give the Princess. On her 17th birthday she will prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and die."

Needless to describe the confusion that follows. Wolfgang Magus watches from its edge, chewing his mustache, worried, unhappy. How her eyes glazed, that day in the garden. Someone treads on his toes.

Then, unexpectedly, he is summoned. "Where is that blasted magician!" Gloved hands push him forward. He stands before the King, whose face has turned unattractively red. The Queen has fainted and a bottle of salts is waved under her nose. The Archbishop is holding the Princess like a sack of barley he has accidentally caught.

"Is this magic, Magus, or just some bloody trick?"

Wolfgang Magus rubs his hands together. He has not stuttered since he was a child, but he answers, "Y-yes, your Majesty. Magic." Sweet, dark, utterly magic. He can smell its power.

"Then get rid of it. Un-magic it. Do whatever you bloody well have to. Make it not be!"

Wolfgang Magus already knows that he will not be able to do so, but he says, without realizing that he is chewing his mustache in front of the King, "O-of course, your Majesty."

IV. *The King*

What would you do, if you were James IV of Britannia, pacing across your council chamber floor before your councilors: the Count of Edinburgh, whose estates are larger than yours and include hillsides of uncut wood for which the French Emperor, who needs to refurbish his navy after the disastrous Indian campaign, would pay handsomely; the Earl of York, who can trace descent, albeit in the female line, from the Tudors; and the Archbishop, who has preached against marital infidelity in his cathedral at Aberdeen? The banner over your head, embroidered with the 12-petaled rose of Britannia, reminds you that your claim to the throne rests tenuously on a former James's dalliance. Edinburgh's thinning hair, York's hanging jowl, the seams, edged with gold thread, where the Archbishop's robe has been let out, warn you, young as you are, with a beard that shines like a tangle of golden wires in the afternoon light, of your gouty future.

Britannia's economy depends on the wool trade, and spun wool sells for twice as much as unspun. Your income depends on the wool tax. The Queen, whom you seldom think of as Elizabeth, is young. You calculate: three months before she recovers from the birth, nine months before she can deliver another child. You might have an heir by next autumn.

"Well?" Edinburgh leans back in his chair, and you wish you could strangle his wrinkled neck.

You say, "I see no reason to destroy a thousand spinning wheels for one madwoman." Madeleine, her face puffed with sleep, her neck covered with a line of red spots where she lay on the pearl necklace you gave her the night before, one black hair tickling your ear. Clever of her, to choose a spinning wheel. "I rely entirely on Wolfgang Magus," whom you believe is a fraud. "Gentlemen, your fairy tales will have taught you that magic must be met with magic. One cannot fight a spell by altering material conditions."

Guffaws from the Archbishop, who is amused to think that he once read fairy tales.

You are a selfish man, James IV, and this is essentially your fault, but you have spoken the truth. Which, I suppose, is why you are the King.

V. *The Queen Dowager*

What is the girl doing? Playing at tug-of-war, evidently, and far too close to the stream. She'll tear her dress on the rosebushes. Careless, these young people, thinks the Queen Dowager. And who is she playing with? Young Lord Harry, who will one day be Count of Edinburgh. The Queen Dowager is proud of her keen eyesight and will not wear spectacles, although she is almost 63.

What a pity the girl is so plain. The Queen Dowager jabs her needle into a black velvet slipper. Eyes like boiled gooseberries that always seem to be staring at you, and no discipline. Now in her day, thinks the Queen Dowager, remembering backboards and nuns who rapped your fingers with canes, in her day girls had discipline. Just look at the Queen: no discipline. Two miscarriages in 10 years, and dead before her 30th birthday. Of course linen is so much cheaper now that the kingdoms are united. But if only her Jims (which is how she thinks of the King) could have married that nice German princess.

She jabs the needle again, pulls it out, jabs, knots. She holds up the slipper and then its pair, comparing the roses embroidered on each toe in stitches so even they seem to have been made by a machine. Quite perfect for her Jims, to keep his feet warm on the drafty palace floors.

A tearing sound, and a splash. The girl, of course, as the Queen Dowager could have warned you. Just look at her, with her skirt ripped up one side and her petticoat muddy to the knees.

"I do apologize, Madam. I assure you it's entirely my fault," says Lord Harry, bowing with the superfluous grace of a dancing master.

"It *is* all your fault," says the girl, trying to kick him.

"Alice!" says the Queen Dowager. Imagine the Queen wanting to name the girl Elaine. What a name, for a Princess of Britannia.

"But he took my book of poems and said he was going to throw it into the stream!"

"I'm perfectly sure he did no such thing. Go to your room at once. This is the sort of behavior I would expect from a chimney sweep."

"Then tell him to give my book back!"

Lord Harry bows again and holds out the battered volume. "It was always yours for the asking, your Highness."

Alice turns away, and you see what the Queen Dowager cannot, despite her keen vision: Alice's eyes, slightly prominent, with irises that are indeed the color of gooseberries, have turned red at the corners, and her nose has begun to drip.

VI. *The Spinning Wheel*

It has never wanted to be an assassin. It remembers the cottage on the Isles where it was first made: the warmth of the hearth and the feel of its maker's hands, worn smooth from rubbing and lanolin.

It remembers the first words it heard: "And why are you carving roses on it, then?"

"This one's for a lady. Look how slender it is. It won't take your upland ram's wool. Yearling it'll have to be, for this one."

At night it heard the waves crashing on the rocks, and it listened as their sound mingled with the snoring of its maker and his wife. By day it heard the crying of the sea birds. But it remembered, as in a dream, the songs of inland birds and sunlight on a stone wall. Then the fishermen would come, and one would say, "What's that you're making there, Enoch? Is it for a midget, then?"

Its maker would stroke it with the tips of his fingers and answer,

"Silent, lads. This one's for a lady. It'll spin yarn so fine that a shawl of it will slip through a wedding ring."

It has never wanted to be an assassin, and as it sits in a cottage to the south, listening as Madeleine mutters to herself, it remembers the sounds of sea birds and tries to forget that it was made, not to spin yarn so fine that a shawl of it will slip through a wedding ring, but to kill the King's daughter.

VII. *The Princess*

Alice climbs the tower stairs. She could avoid this perhaps, disguise herself as a peasant woman and beg her way to the Highlands, like a heroine in Scott's novels. But she does not want to avoid this, so she is climbing up the tower stairs on the morning of her 17th birthday, still in her nightgown and clutching a battered copy of Goethe's poems whose binding is so torn that the book is tied with pink ribbon to keep the pages together. Her feet are bare, because opening the shoe closet might have woken the Baroness, who has slept in her room since she was a child. Barefoot, she has walked silently past the sleeping guards, who are supposed to guard her today with particular care. She has walked past the Queen Dowager's drawing room thinking: *If anyone hears me, I will be in disgrace.* She has spent a larger portion of her life in disgrace than out of it, and she remembers that she once thought of it as an imaginary country, Disgrace, with its own rivers and towns and trade routes. Would it be different if her mother were alive? She remembers a face creased from the folds of the pillow, and pale lips whispering to her about the lily maid of Astolat. It would, she supposes, have made no difference. She trips on a step and almost drops the book.

She has no reason to suppose, of course, that the Witch will be there, so early in the morning. But somehow, Alice hopes she will be.

She is, sitting on a low stool with a spinning wheel in front of her.

"Were you waiting for me?" asks Alice. It sounds silly—who else would the Witch be waiting for? But she can think of nothing else to say.

"I was." The Witch's voice is low and cadenced, and although she has wrinkles at the corners of her mouth and her hair has turned gray, she is still rather beautiful. She is not, exactly, what Alice expected.

"How did you know I was coming so early?"

The Witch smiles. "I've gotten rather good at magic. I sell fortunes for my living, you see. It's not much, just enough to buy bread and butter and to rent a small cottage. But it amuses me, knowing things about people—their lives and their future."

"Do you know anything—about me?" Alice looks down at the book. What idiotic questions to be asking. Surely a heroine from Scott's novels would think of better.

The Witch nods, and sunlight catches the silver cross suspended from a chain around her neck. She says, "I'm sorry."

Alice understands, and her face flushes. "You mean that you've been watching all along. That you've known what it's been like, being the cursed princess." She turns and walks to the tower window, so the Witch will not see how her hands are shaking. "You know the other girls wouldn't play with me or touch my toys, that the boys would spit over their shoulder, to break the curse they said. Even the chambermaids would make the sign of the cross when I wasn't looking." She can feel tears where they always begin, at the corners of her eyes, and she leans out the window to cool her face. Far below, a gardener is crossing the courtyard, carrying a pair of pruning shears. She says, "Why didn't you remove the curse, then?"

"Magic doesn't work that way." The Witch's voice is sad. Alice turns around and sees that her cheeks are wet with tears. Alice steps toward her, trips again, and drops the book, which falls under the spinning wheel.

The Witch picks it up and smiles as she examines the cover. "Of course, your Goethe. I always wondered what happened to Wolfgang Magus."

Alice thinks with relief: *I'm not going to cry after all.* "He went away, after his sister died. She had consumption, you know, for years and years. He was always sending her money for medicine. He wrote to me once after he left, from Berlin, to say that he had bought his old master's house. But I never heard from him again."

The Witch wipes her cheeks with the back of one hand. "I didn't know about his sister's death. I spoke to him once. He was a kind man."

Alice takes the book from her, then says, carefully, as though each word has to be placed in the correct order, "Do you think his spell will work? I mean, do you think I'll really sleep for a hundred years, rather than—you know?"

The Witch looks up, her cheeks still damp, but her face composed. "I can't answer that for you. You may simply be—preserved. In a pocket of time, as it were."

Alice tugs at the ribbon that binds the book together. "It doesn't matter, really. I don't think I care either way." She strokes the spinning wheel, which turns as she touches it. "How beautiful, as though it had been made just for me."

The Witch raises a hand, to stop her perhaps, or to arrest time itself, but Alice places her finger on the spindle and presses until a drop of blood blossoms, as dark as the petal of a Cardinal de Richelieu, and runs into her palm.

Before she falls, she sees the Witch with her head bowed and her shoulders shaking. She thinks, for no reason she can remember, *Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable* ...

VIII. *The Gardener*

Long after, when the gardener has grown into an old man, he will tell his grandchildren about that day: skittish horses being harnessed by panicked grooms, nobles struggling with boxes while their valets carry armchairs and even bedsteads through the palace halls, the King in a pair of black velvet slippers shouting directions. The cooks leave the kettles whistling in the kitchen, the Queen Dowager leaves her jewels lying where she has dropped them while tripping over the hem of her nightgown. Everyone runs to escape the spreading lethargy that has already caught a canary in his cage, who makes soft noises as he settles into his feathers. The flowers are closing in the garden, and even the lobsters that the chef was planning to serve with melted butter for lunch have lain down in a corner of their tank.

In a few hours, the palace is left to the canary, and the lobsters, and the Princess lying on the floor of the tower.

He will say, "I was pruning a rosebush at the bottom of the tower that day. Look what I took away with me!" Then he will display a rose of the variety called Britannia, with its 12 petals half-open, still fresh and moist with dew. His granddaughter will say, "Oh, grandpa, you picked that in the garden just this morning!" His grandson, who is practical and wants to be an engineer, will say, "Grandpa, people can't sleep for a hundred years."

IX. *The Tower*

Let us get a historical perspective. When the tower was quite young, only a hovel really, a child knocked a stone out of its wall, and it gained an eye. With that eye it watched as the child's father, a chieftain, led his tribe against soldiers with metal breastplates and plumed helmets. Two lines met on the plain below: one regular, gleaming in the morning sun like the edge of a sword, the other ragged and blue like the crest of a wave. The wave washed over the sword, which splintered into a hundred pieces.

Time passed, and the tower gained a second story with a vertical

eye as narrow as a staff. It watched a wooden structure grow beside it, in which men and cattle mingled indiscriminately. One morning it felt a prick, the point of an arrow. A bright flame blossomed from the beams of the wooden structure, men scattered, cattle screamed. One of its walls was singed, and it felt the wound as a distant heat. A castle rose, commanded by a man with eyebrows so blond that they were almost white, who caused the name Aelfric to be carved on the lintel of the tower. The castle's stone walls, pummeled with catapults, battered by rams, fell into fragments. From the hilltop a man watched, whose nose had been broken in childhood and remained perpetually crooked. When a palace rose from the broken rock, he caused the name D'Arblay to be carved on the lintel of the tower, beside a boar rampant.

Time passed, and a woman on a white horse rode through the village that had grown around the palace walls, followed by a retinue that stretched behind her like a scarf. At the palace gates, a Darbley grown rich on tobacco plantations in the New World presented her with the palace, in honor of her marriage to the Earl of Essex. The lintel of the tower was carved with the name Elizabeth I, and it gained a third story with a lead-paned window, through which it saw in facets like a fly. One morning it watched the Queen's son, who had been playing ball in the courtyard, fall to the ground with blood dripping from his nostrils. The windows of the palace were draped in black velvet, the Queen and her consort rode away with their retinue, and the village was deserted.

Time passed. Leaves turned red or gold, snow fell and melted into rivulets, young hawks took their first flight from the battlements. A rosebush grew at the foot of the tower: a hybrid, half wild rose, half Cuisse de Nymphe, with 12 petals and briary canes. One morning men rode up to the tower on horses whose hides were mottled with sweat. In its first story, where the chieftain's son had played, they talked of James III. Troops were coming from France, and the password was "Britannia." As they left the tower, one of them plucked a flower from the rosebush. "Let this be our symbol," he said in the self-conscious voice of a man who thinks that his words will be recorded in history books. The tower thought it would be alone again, but by the time the leaves had turned, a procession rode up to the palace gates, waving banners embroidered with a 12-petaled rose. Furniture arrived from France, fruit trees were planted, and the village streets were paved so that the hoofs of cattle clopped on the stones.

It has stood a long time, that tower, watching the life around it shift and alter, like eddies in a stream. It looks down once again on a deserted village—but no, not entirely deserted. A woman still lives in a cottage at its edge. Her hair has turned white, but she works every day in her garden, gathering tomatoes and cutting back the mint. When the day is particularly warm, she brings out a spinning wheel and sits in the garden, spinning yarn so fine that a shawl of it will slip through a wedding ring. If the breezes come from the west, the tower can hear her humming, just above the humming that the wheel makes as it spins. Time passes, and she sits out in the garden less often, until one day it realizes that it has not seen her for many days, or perhaps years.

Sometimes at night it thinks it can hear the Princess breathing in her sleep.

X. *The Hound*

In a hundred years, only one creature comes to the palace: a hound whose coat is matted with dust. Along his back the hair has come out in tufts, exposing a mass of sores. He lopes unevenly: on one of his forepaws, the inner toes have been crushed.

He has run from a city reduced to stone skeletons and drifting piles of ash, dodging tanks, mortar fire, the rifles of farmers desperate for food. For weeks now, he has been loping along the dusty roads. When rain comes, he has curled himself under a tree. Afterward, he has drunk from puddles, then loped along again with mud drying in the hollows of his paws. Sometimes he has left the road and tried to catch rabbits in the fields, but his damaged paw prevents him from running quickly enough. He has smelled them in their burrows beneath the summer grasses, beneath the poppies and cornflowers, tantalizing, inaccessible.

This morning he has smelled something different, pungent, like spoiled meat: the smell of enchantment. He has left the road and entered the forest, finding his way through a tangle of briars. He has come to the village, loped up its cobbled streets and through the gates of the palace. His claws click on its stone floor.

What does he smell? A fragrance, drifting, indistinct, remembered from when he was a pup: bacon. There, through that doorway. He lopes into the Great Hall, where breakfast waits in chafing dishes. The eggs are still firm, their yolks plump and yellow, their whites delicately fried. Sausages sit in their own grease. The toast is crisp.

He leaves a streak of egg yolk and sausage grease on the tablecloth, which has remained pristine for half a century, and falls asleep in the Queen Dowager's drawing room, in a square of sunlight that has not faded the baroque carpet.

He lives happily ever after. Someone has to. As summer passes, he wanders through the palace gardens, digging in the flower beds and trying to catch the sleeping fish that float in the ornamental pools. One day he urinates on the side of the tower, from which the dark smell emanates, to show his disapproval. When he is hungry he eats from the side of beef hanging in the larder, the sausage and eggs remaining on the breakfast table, or the mice sleeping beneath the harpsichord. In autumn, he chases the leaves falling red and yellow over the lawns and manages to pull a lobster from the kitchen tank, although his teeth can barely crack its hard shell. He never figures out how to extract the canary from its cage. When winter comes, the stone floor sends an ache through his damaged paw, and he sleeps in the King's bed, under velvet covers.

When summer comes again, he is too old to run about the garden. He lies in the Queen Dowager's drawing room and dreams of being a pup, of warm hands and a voice that whispered "What a beautiful dog," and that magical thing called a ball. He dies, his stomach still full with the last of the poached eggs. A proper fairy tale should, perhaps, end here.

XI. *The Prince*

Here comes the Prince on a bulldozer. What did you expect? Things change in a hundred years.

Harry pulls back the brake and wipes his forehead, which is glistening with sweat. He runs his fingers through blond hair that stands up like a shock of corn. It is just past noon, and the skin on his nose is already red and peeling.

Two acres, and he'll knock off for some beer and that liver and onion sandwich Madge made him this morning, whose grease, together with the juice of a large gherkin, is soaking its way through a brown paper wrapper and will soon stain the leather of his satchel. He leans back, looks at the tangle of briars that form the undergrowth in this part of the forest, and chews on the knuckle of his thumb.

Two acres in the middle of the forest, enough for some barley and a still. Hell of a good idea, he thinks, already imagining the bottles on their way to Amsterdam, already imagining his pals Mike and Steve watching football on a color telly. Linoleum on the kitchen floor, like Madge always wanted, and cigarettes from America. "Not that damn rationed stuff," he says out loud, then looks around startled. What kind of fool idiot talks to himself? He chews on the knuckle of his thumb again. Twenty pounds to make the Police Commissioner look the other way. Damn lucky Madge could lend them the money. The bulldozer starts up again with a roar and the smell of diesel.

You don't like where this is going. What sort of Prince is this, with his liver and onion sandwich, his gherkin and beer? Forgive me. I

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Is it a fair trade—
the food of the spirit for
the hunger of the soul?

Field of Angels

There is a field of angels in front of me. They seem to sway in the fading light, dancing, dwindling, becoming transparent creatures of myth, not the solid stone creations that I know they are.

By Lauren Halkon Illustration by Lauren Halkon

I have been waiting here in the trees at the edge of the compound since early evening. As the light has dimmed with each passing hour I have moved closer to the fence that bars me from my goal. The fence that speaks in the electrical tones of death and warning. If I should touch it they will find my body too late to save me from the flinging, smoking shocks. I have seen it; I have seen it happen to the animals and birds that ventured too close. The noise, the violence, the smell. They stayed with me for many days.

But now, as the sun finally drops below the horizon and the air hangs cool and silent for a moment before the clicking, rustling, softly breathing serenade of nocturnal life begins, I drop to my knees before it and begin to dig with all the single-minded tenacity of the badger.

I had to wait till night fell for it is the only time Those Who Collect are not around to protect and guard their stolen possessions. Stolen possessions. And one of them mine. One I've only just remembered but one I've come to take back.

The earth is hard and dry, sharp-edged and coarse between my fingers, but it does not stop me; my hands are harder, dryer, than it can ever be. Life has made them so. I ease my breath out in carefully measured exhalations, so quiet that even the foraging animals do not heed me. I feel a vole scamper around my ankles before disappearing on her urgent business. I take this as a good omen and continue scraping and piling, scraping and piling, scraping and piling.

Hours pass in this way and soon the moon sails high and distant overhead, outshining all the stars and casting a misty umber circle all about herself, a beautiful, perfect arc that touches almost half the sky. It is rare, this phenomenon, breathtaking, one that I take the time to appreciate despite the urgency of my mission. It is another omen perhaps and the hush that greets it is alive. I wonder again why the others fear this time so, fear it so much that they cannot bear to walk within it.

I shake my head and look back to the ground, admiring my work, lifted by the sight I have just witnessed. The hole I have excavated beneath the fence is small, perilously close to the low-humming electrics that pervade the wire, but I believe I can pass through. I believe it with all the passion that brought me here, fueled on myriad thoughts and remembrances, to retrieve what is mine.

I cast my gaze all around the compound, just in case Those Who Collect have somehow managed to overcome their fear and are in fact waiting in the shadows for one so foolish as I. But no, they have not, the night is empty. Only the vicious fence exists, stretching away to my left and right, a curious cross-linked shadow closing away the field beyond. Squat, square buildings stand at each end of the field, slightly paler shadows against the smooth blackness of the sky. Their windows are dark and I know that therein sleep my enemies, those who stole from me, those who stole from everyone. In between these two dreaming concrete captors a vast field of strange, beautiful, twisted shapes beckons.

My field. My field of angels. All caught in the night, arms lifted to me.

It is to these I must go.

I flatten myself to the ground and slowly drag my body through the gap that could kill me in an instant if I should dare to breathe before I'm past. It is a tight squeeze, even I, wiry and strong from the life I lead, find it difficult to edge my way through. For one single moment I hold my breath as I feel a single thread from my coat catch on thrumming wire. With a movement so small as to be a whisper I rock backward slowly, slightly, terrifyingly, unhook myself, and feel my heart start beating again. I continue through, fear keeping me suitably cautious, and soon I stand on the other side and all awaits me and me alone.

I had not truly trusted my memories, had thought that perhaps the endless days alone, save for the few rare occasions when I happened on others of my kind, had driven me mad. But no, all is true; I behold the proof of it before me.

And so I tiptoe slowly forward, hardly daring to breathe though the night, by now, is so darkened by the clouds that conspire to hide away the moon that only I, with eyes even a cat would envy, can see what lies ahead. Angels, winged and beautiful, eyes so wide and full of benevolent love, compassion, sadness, that for a moment I am reminded of the humans I once knew in a village I once loved, where emotions played, day by day, across people who lived and did not question. Just to be was enough. Life took too much time for anything else.

I reach out a hand clad in ragged gloves, trail my fingers softly over the smooth, hard surface, the stone that holds these perfect features, this one of oh so many. And how am I to know the one I seek?

The Angel's cheek is cool to my touch and I think for a moment that I see her eyes blink, that she turns her gaze on me and sheds a single tear. I look away; I cannot bear the despair in her eyes. Turning away from her brings my stricken gaze to rest on one I know immediately as my own, standing still and lonesome, book in hand, unknowing in her stony silence of the cruel, kind words this book does hold. Unknowing of the paradoxes passed down to humankind.

Darkness courts her, yet he is too afraid to touch her it seems, for she shines like the lost moon to me. I thread my way through line upon line, row upon row, yearning arm upon yearning arm, to meet her, to touch the book she seems to offer and wonder, if only words meant something to me now, I could read and perhaps understand.

Yet the story she holds in her mottled form, the softness of the lichen growing about her skirts, the tiny scratches, holes and marks where Those Who Collect were not so careful in their gathering, speak realms of wisdom to me. I quickly wrap her in the sling I had fashioned not so long ago when my memories began to come clear to me. I stroke her brow in reassurance before dragging her along behind me back to the hole in the fence and the outside world where I know she belongs, somewhere.

It is only when I get here that I realize my mistake, that she is far too big, far too cumbersome, to ever fit, and I give voice to a little moan of animalistic despair that I should have come so far only to fail now.

Curiously the moon chooses this moment to drift from behind her cloud and I look up at her pale disc, hoping for a dream to help me see my way clear. She shimmers in my vision and I blink away the tears I'm only now aware of. One drops from my cheek and lands on that of my angel where she peeks from her cloth bed. I frown at this. My anger grows.

"No tears, no," I mutter to myself. "Not like this, not tears of sadness now, only happy tears for me."

And then I bend to the ground and I dig some more. I make that hole so large that the moon laughs overhead as she sails across the sky. But I do not heed her warning till it is too late and the false dawn haunts the sky with palest gray. Only then do I realize that if I am not gone soon Those Who Collect will waken and I will sorely wish my tears were only ones of sadness.

"So, my angel." I speak to myself. Maybe. "Time for us to go."

I look at the hole. It is not big enough, but I have no more time. The sun is on his way. I push my angel forward, for of course she must go before me. I twist and turn her oh so carefully, taking care of the vicious fence, and in my skill and determination I almost send her through. That is when the first ray of treacherous sunlight touches my back, makes me jump, makes my angel lurch in sympathy and the electric fires off with all the raucous abandon of the startled crow. Lights flare in the Collectors' concrete bunkers, sirens blare, and I stand and stare and wonder what and where now.

Voices ring out across the field and I find that the sun blinds me where the night never did. For a moment I am helpless, cast in yellow halo against the new day. Black shadow bodies emerge from

concrete hides, heads turn toward me, arms rise to point. From somewhere in the depths of a memory I'd rather not own comes the name for the cold metal objects they lift and point in my direction.

The first bullet slams into the ground a few feet away from me, digging a hole deep into the ground. It wakens me from my near fatal paralysis, I drop to the ground and dig and shove and push and wriggle, all the while the shouts and cracks of furious Collectors and their deadly toys ringing around me, battering at my ears, my eyes, my heart.

Smoke and earth fly all about me and my angel cries as shards fly from her, graze my cheek in quick-drawing of blood and bury themselves somewhere far behind me. Pounding feet draw nearer now and I wail to myself in echo of the gunfire as I feel my angel finally slip free on the other side and I am through in a second's thought behind her, gather her up and race into the sheltering trees with her bumping along behind me like a ridiculous sled that will never ever glide.

The forest closes quickly around me, the trees grow thick so quickly, far more so than thought all those earnest, frightened people who said we killed nature once upon a time. They never knew that she is not so easy to kill; she is always there, always waiting.

The only sound in my ears is the pounding, drumming, liquid beat of my own heart, my breath speaking in deep-filled gasps, more from terror than exertion. Terror because I know that though the Collectors fear the night that never flees too far from the woods, this theft will bring out lost courage in them. I know they will not, cannot, accept this loss. For there are those who pay dearly for these angels of which my own is one, and to lose one is to lose all in their eyes.

I am not wrong. Already I hear the crashing of foliage rent loose by those who know no better, those who do not know the secret of silence. I close my eyes and lay myself down next to my angel, hold her close and wait for them to pass me by.

It is the only way.

They pass so close, their guns and bullets piercing what their minds and bodies cannot. Twice I feel hot metal thud beside me, but I do not flinch in my tangled hiding place. Even the low cries of disturbed animals have no effect on me as the trampling Collectors clamor and curse and gather together to plan to no avail, for this is my domain, never theirs, and I want to laugh when I hear them retreat, back to the safety of the field they built within the land they fear to tread.

Yet I know it is but a short reprieve, for they have friends out there, out there where the forest does not spread forever, and that is where I must go if I am to return my angel to her proper place. And now I think I have some inkling of where that might be, because, here in this dank, dark hiding place of mine, amongst the rank mutterings of the dead and decaying, the vibrant hum of full and throbbing life, I have come across a memory so complete, so perfect, so simple in its imagery that I cry without a sound.

It is a memory of a childhood spent in a place not so unlike this, but smaller, edging onto a greater whole, the smell in the air one of salt and water and a freshness that even the closeness of the woods cannot completely dispel. In this memory the trees are sparser, yet no less beautiful, they let in a light that glitters like a million sundrops on oceans, and this thought too, sparks off more memories that I know are to come, yet I force my mind to return to the one at hand, for it is important, I think. This childlike me, this smaller, thinner, lighter version of me that existed once and perhaps still does or never can or never will, this childlike me hops and skips and jumps from log to log, twisting wondering head from side to side to take in "oh so much." So many birds that sing and flitter barely seen overhead, the quickly muffled scuffle of a frightened rabbit, the twirling gossamer dust that is a thousand thousand seeds, all caught in a time warp just for me. There I see come in to land upon my hand an insect that I do not know by textbook name, that I know only by the coloring of its wings, the feel of its tiny, tickly feet upon my skin. I see myself sitting in a patch of dappled light and talking to this one of many creatures, of seeing it, looking at it, feeling its every move, its every pulse of life. Then more come and I am surrounded yet not afraid. I disappear beneath a mass of bright and dark skittering limbs and silk-soft wings. Some would think this a horror beyond horrors but I am laughing for this is life and the last thing this memory gifts me is the laughing, sweet-lined face of a woman who chastises me with such good nature for bringing so much mud and so many bugs into the house every evening. I feel her soft hands scrubbing my skin clean and hug my angel close for a while to sleep the night's work away.

The risen sun would offer no more life to this place, indeed I think the moon is more kind, for I have seen this cursed earth in brighter times and it is as dead as the souls of those who choose to live here still.

When I awaken it is night again and I feel strong, stronger perhaps than I ever have. But it is a different strength, born of something in the heart; not these cruder muscles that have helped me glean a life for others so that they in turn will leave me to mine. It is to these others, or rather, past these others, that I must journey tonight, through their land, a land I live upon, a land I feed with the toil of my hands, but a land I will never, can never, call my own.

I settle my angel more surely in her carrying case, sling the straps over my shoulder and begin to drag her through the forest, taking paths that only I and the Others know, paths that one need only to blink for a moment to miss. I reclaim her from time to entangling time, but I do not begrudge the land this and always, with patience I separate her from the clutching branches, my inhuman eyes leading hands about their duty in a manner that would leave so many others cold because they have lost the feel, lost the gift of seeing without the ever-limiting bounds of logic. The mutter of nightlife surrounds me and it is with melancholic regret that I reach the forest perimeter and set out across the plains.

The plains spread a long way across this part of the land. A flat expanse of endless, colorless grass, dry and crackling beneath my feet. The risen sun would offer no more life to this place, indeed I

think the moon is more kind, for I have seen this cursed earth in brighter times and it is as dead as the souls of those who choose to live here still. Here and there the ground is still marked with the signs of those years so long past. Every now and then a pure white line pokes up amidst the excuse for grass and a solitary shard of gray threatens to rise anew, but these are few and far between and for the most part no one would ever know what once crossed this wide and open land. Even the people who live their lives locked in the towers I can see now on the horizon have forgotten what once lay here. They look only to their homes, the place they think the gods made their own, the place where power was forged, the place where rules were made.

I cast a glance their way now. The towers are beautiful in a cold, impersonal way. They are gray in shade, huge, reaching to the sky, six of them together, the number of the gods. They start out wide at the bottom, curve in the middle, swell to a gentle funnel at the top. I can almost believe in the tales of the ancient deities who once ran their world from these Olympian mountains. For these towers are smooth as the hide of angels. I think this is why the people who dwell within them covet the stone beauties Those Who Collect gather from the secret yards, whose locations are a mystery to all but their own number. The people in the towers come out only when a Field is full. I have seen them from time to time, a vast stream of thin, pale people garbed in once white clothes, all afraid and staring, fearing us, as they have always done, yet their lust for the stone angels entrancing them ever onward to part with their magic in return for the work of Those Who Collect.

Yet I know that these thin, pale people who fear my kind so are dependent upon us as they are in a different way upon Those Who Collect. Each of us feeds a different hunger. One of the spirit and one of the body. They cannot feed themselves you see. In return for food of the spirit they give Those Who Collect the knowledge of building and violent shakings and other more deadly things. And for the body they rely upon such as I, the lost and wandering ones, to catch and harvest food in return for the magic that allows us to wander so—the magic I hold in my hand now, the little needle that tells me which way to go, that always wondrously points to blessed north. For now I do know where I go, my angel told me so in my dreams last night. I'm going east, toward the rising sun, toward the end of the land some have spoken of but few have ever seen. I'm going … home. I think.

The thought of this fills me with wonder and, for some reason I do not understand, I feel the need to turn around, bid a final farewell to this land I know I'll never again see. It is when I do this that I see the thin, pale ones watching me, eyes dark, large, unwavering in their owlish scrutiny.

The sky rumbles ominously overhead as I cast my numbed and terrified gaze over the rows upon rows of half-seen, ghostlike people who glide closer as I watch, their eyes never leaving me. Not a sound do they make and I can almost comprehend how they have approached without my knowledge. Almost.

I turn at their center, surrounded on each and every side, whimpering despite my efforts to keep my fear at bay. It is unnatural, this; they are unnatural with their bland expressionless faces. The roles have reversed, their fear is gone, they have ventured out into the night they have always hidden from.

When I raise a head full of fond-held images of village and sea the only thing that greets my ever-fading gaze is a vision of wire and steel, concrete and trapped angels.

Their eyes slide from me to the cloth-wrapped package I drag behind me and I catch my breath in my throat. The angel! They have come for the angel! I knew of the hunger in their souls. But this? This? For one?

Their gaze rises back to me and I shake my head wildly from side to side while their hands come up as of one thought. I back away but only so far as the grasping fingers behind me. They begin to rake and claw at me and now they do make a sound, they start to murmur and moan, push me down to the ground and I can do nothing, nothing, beneath their weight. I sob and reach out to my angel but other cruel hands drag her away, remove her cloak, coo and croon over her.

"No!" I scream at them, at the foul night that no longer scares them, that no longer seems my friend.

The sky rumbles in answer, loud, shattering, like the end of countless ages. A brilliant flash of light sheers between land and unseen looming clouds, binds and slashes the darkness in one pure and simple strike, cuts into the masses of the thin and pale and burns them like so much pointless chaff.

They wail and scream, spinning like tops, flames shooting from their clothes as though they are made not of flesh but of some viciously, vibrantly flammable liquid. They dance amongst their companions in beautiful parabolas, catching unwilling partners and waltzing them to oblivion.

"Angel!" I cry, scuffling on my hands and knees through the screeching orange masses that have so soon forgotten me. "Angel! Don't be scared." More lightning slams the ground; I feel it shake, my hair stands on end, my teeth fry in my head, a thin, pale one whirls before me, eyes alight, hands melting, lost again in black night confusion an instant later. I move on instinct alone, guided by the soft cries of my stone angel.

"I'm coming," I call to her and lash out at one who falls in my way, pushing the flailing body aside, uncaring, as they have always been of me.

"You deserve it!" I am standing tall, another shadow in the night, awaiting the oh so obedient flash of light that casts me all of a sud-

den in perfect spotlight for all to see. "You deserve it all!" I scream and they turn to look at me, these ghosts who could never be one with the night; they turn and stare, even those who burn, for they recognize me, they *know* me.

"You deserve it, you stole from us, you stole our past and for that you can all burn. Burn to hell for all I care. Burn!"

The sky clattered and a hundred thin pale ones clapped hands to ears, staggered, fell. I took my chance, I saw my angel where they had feebly attempted to drag her away, back to their towers, back to do whatever it was they did with her kind. I saw her and gathered her to me, speaking tender words in the blackness between strikes. When next the lightning came I was gone from them and did not look back to witness their suffering, for I had my home to find.

I hear the gentle lapping of water and for a moment this gives me strength to open my eyes. Pure bright blue meets my gaze, brilliant white clouds edged in that platinum aura that means the sun is soon to show his face, and indeed, as I watch, I see the brilliant orb slide into view and close my eyes again, my inner lids burning red, to shield them from the glare. I know not how many days it is since the thin, pale ones caught me and shed my blood. They did me more harm than I at first thought and ever since that night my wounds have refused to heal, countless slashes and gouges weep and seep as though infected by the same disease that holds those people to their tiny tower worlds.

I turn slowly onto my side, wondering at these aching limbs that had once been so much younger than they are now. I am near the edge of the raft I made when I reached the river. My angel lies at the center, firmly lashed in place. Her weight causes us to ride low in the water but my skills are untold, even when I am wasted by pain and disease, and I know our poor ship will hold together. Trees hang low on either side of the narrow banks and I feel instinctively that someone or something watches me from behind their summer depths, but I am beyond caring at this stage. Perhaps it is just the invisible gaze of countless birds and animals I feel. It can hang heavy at times when the insects buzz frenetically in the midday heat and fish leap occasionally so that there is one less of their number to buzz. A gentle breeze takes the worst of the heat from me, rustles the branches and leaves above my head. The water not four inches from my nose is still and dark, deep I know, and I peer into it, at my own reflection, and see a face I barely remember, full of lines and sags and topped with hair more salt now than pepper. Yet my eyes, I am fascinated by my eyes. They seem to hold endless secrets in depths almost as unfathomable as the silky stillness of this lush, green water we barely part.

I gasp softly as pictures form in the water beneath me, too tired now to fear, not that these images are fearful. In them I see my wood full of precious insect life, I see beyond this, I see a river snake out through a cluster of yellow-brick cottages the like of which I've never seen, so how do I know their names? But my eyes know, my eyes have memories. I see a path leading to the edge of a cliff, below, vast waves of water, so unlike this river, beating against gleaming, black rocks. The sound fills me with a peace and a pleasure so great I feel my feeble human soul cannot hope to contain it. I drop to my knees and laugh in soft and childish delight, full to bursting with the feel of the wind tugging at my face, the freshness in the air, the life. With me is a presence, a familiar, welcome presence. My eyes look up, the picture in the river changes. I see again the face of a woman, a woman I recognize, she was the one who scrubbed me clean, little, grubby urchin me. She was the one who held me when I was scared, and look, she holds me now, I can feel her arms warm and comforting around me. I can hear her strong voice telling me not to mind now, not to mind the pain, because it will all go away soon, and even though she will be gone in body she will always be there in spirit.

Tears stand in my old eyes, a leaf spirals down from a leaning willow, sends my memories rippling away in ever-spreading circles. Somewhere in the distance they will touch a land, a home, where I now know for sure my angel belongs.

My river journey ends when it does and the sensation of our raft jolting against the shore snaps me back to wakefulness. I have been sleeping too much in these last few days, barely noticing the land that has slid past me on either side, too caught up in dream-memories of the place I am going to, too caught up in remembrances of a half-forgotten life to see the world as it now is.

When I raise a head full of fond-held images of village and sea the only thing that greets my ever-fading gaze is a vision of wire and steel, concrete and trapped angels. I hear my own sweet, free creature cry in echo of my own tears for we have come full circle, another field lies here, here of all places, here where I began and another ended. Even now Those Who Collect emerge blinking into the daylight—oh why was I so foolish as to travel in the day?—and fix their gazes upon me. Their weapons turn and I know without a doubt that they have been waiting for me. All this time I thought I was free and it was all a sham, the others told them, the other Collectors. I never escaped. Never. And I never will.

I roll onto my face and sob soft and silent tears of such bitterness that I surprise myself. My body is wracked, I shake so that I will surely fall apart and my throat feels raw, as though it is bleeding.

"No," I murmur, for it is all I am now capable of. My blood runs freely everywhere it seems. "No, this is not the way it's going to be."

Before I know it I am on my feet. I take hold of my angel and drag her from the raft, blood surging in my veins, pumping all the quicker from my wounds, exhilarating all the same.

The first gunshots splatter the water beside me and my breath jerks out in a terrified gasp. A bullet lodges in my left leg and I cry aloud, stumble, fall, splash into the water yet still pull, still heave at my angel, for she is going home, whether they like it or not.

More shots sound, another one hits home, I know not where, I fall face-first this time, angel lost to me. I feel my last breath rattle in my lungs, then suddenly I am aware of humans around me, the smell of unwashed but beloved bodies that lift me up with hands as strong as mine, hands that take gentle hold of my angel, bring her, too, and they carry us, they carry us through the hail of bullets, some falling, some standing tall, always another to take their place and Those Who Collect lower their spent guns and stare as we walk past.

They do not reload. Their eyes tell it all.

The path to the cliff top beckons and my solemn bearers know the way as well as I though no cottages stand here now. I know them, you see, the ones who carry my angel and me. It is their gaze I felt upon me on the river, others of my kind, others who have been stolen from, others who fed the greed of the thin, pale ones. They saw them burn in the night, they saw it and I think I am something worshipful to them now for they lay me down upon the spot I remember so well from that past life and step back, bow their heads, and wait for me to do that which I must.

My body is a scarlet rag now. I can see my life running from me, feel the numbness where metal invades parts it has no right to be, yet still I find the strength to slide my hunter's fingers beneath my angel's back and raise her slowly, steadily to her full and glorious height. For the last time I look her in the eyes and remember standing her above my mother's grave. I know what was stolen from me and I slip to the ground and sit and die at her feet, above the ashes of the woman who gave me life in more ways than one.

The hunters stared at the dead woman, one of their kind, for many long minutes. Somewhere far below the distant sea pounded a gentle heartbeat in time with their own. A solitary sea gull mourned into the wind. They shivered as one and lifted their gaze to meet that of the beautiful angel. They, too, remembered a past. A life. They turned as one on the Field of Angels that lay behind them and this time no one stood in their way. ❧

BY TERRI WINDLING

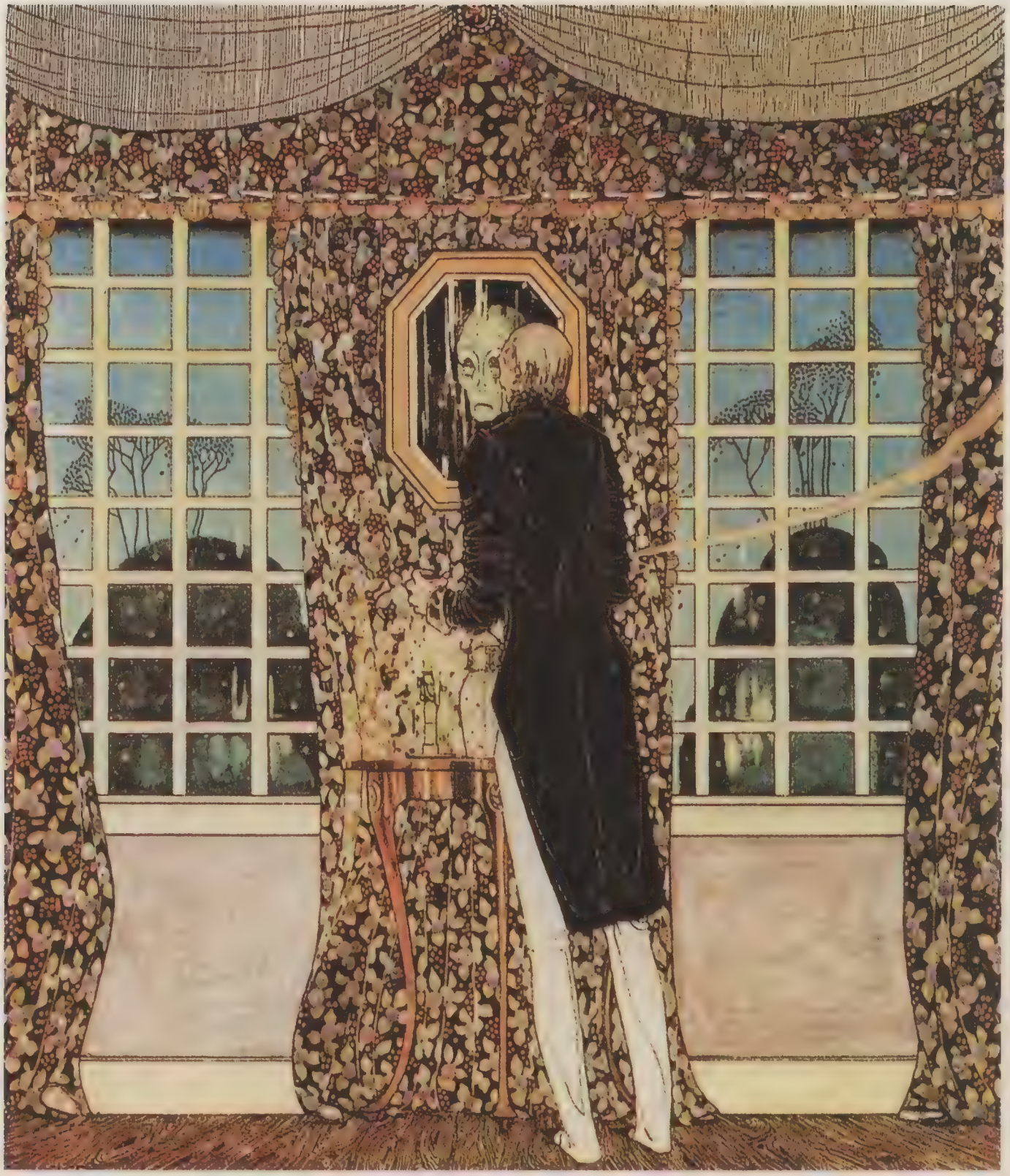
KAY NIELSEN'S GOLDEN AGE

Danish illustrator Kay Nielsen inspired a new generation of mythic artists just as he was inspired by Aubrey Beardsley.

The period in art history now referred to as the Golden Age of Book Illustration occurred in London at the end of the 19th century and in the dawning years of the 20th. It grew out of the reassessment of Book Arts fostered by the Pre-Raphaelites and the Arts & Crafts movement, and was aided by advances in printing techniques that made the publication of sumptuously illustrated volumes suddenly economically feasible. As a result, a number of the greatest book illustrators the world has ever known were clustered in London during those years: Walter Crane, Arthur Rackham, Edmund Dulac, Charles and William Heath Robinson, Charles Ricketts, Lawrence Housman, Henry Ford, Jean de Bosschère, and many others—including a young Dane named Kay (pronounced "Kigh") Nielsen, who turned up in the city in 1911 at the tender age of 25 with a series of black-and-white drawings inspired by Beardsley under his arm.

OPPOSITE: Glimpses of Beardsley's influence can be seen in an illustration for "The Lassie and Her Godmother" from East of the Sun, West of the Moon.

LEFT: Nielsen's skill at decorative composition enhances "From The Three Princesses in the Blue Mountain," from East of the Sun, West of the Moon.



ABOVE: Nielsen goes behind the scenes to watch a Victorian waiter fondle his money in "The Man Who Never Laughed," from In Powder and Crinoline.

OPPOSITE: "The White Swans—Les Cynes Blancs," from Fleur-de-Neige et D'autres Contes de Grimm.

Kay had been born into an illustrious theater family in Copenhagen in 1886, growing up with the trappings of wealth and fame and a strong interest in the arts. (His father was the director of the Royal Danish Theater, his mother was a much revered actress, and visitors to the Nielsen household included Ibsen and Grieg.) At 18, Kay left Copenhagen for Paris to study art in Montparnasse. It was there that he, like so many art students, discovered Aubrey Beardsley's work, with its fine use of line and ornamentation and its aura of dark romance. Beardsley's drawings made a considerable impression on him, containing as they did two of the things he loved best: imagery from myth and folklore and the strong influence of Japanese art. Under Beardsley's spell, Nielsen produced a series of morbidly romantic black-and-

ABOVE: "Rosanie or The Inconstant Prince," from in In Powder and Crinoline *is both whimsical and decorative.*

OPPOSITE: "East of the Sun and West of the Moon," from a book of Norse tales bearing the same title.

white drawings titled *The Book of Death,* portraying the tragic love of Pierrot for a languid, dying young maiden. Moving from Paris to Beardsley's homeland, Kay mounted a major London gallery exhibition of the series in 1911. Mixed in with these darker drawings were designs for watercolors based on classic fairy tales—the art for which the young painter would henceforth be best known.

On the strength of this work, Kay soon received his first English book commission: *In Powder and Crinoline,* a volume of fairy tales retold by Arthur Quiller-Couch. The book appeared in 1913 and instantly garnered wide acclaim. A year later, when he was just 28, Kay published the work that would be his most famous: *East of the Sun, West of the Moon: Old Tales from the Norse.* With these two volumes, Kay Nielsen came out from under Aubrey Beardsley's long shadow into a style that was all his own—one that incorporated the influence of Romantic Art, Art Nouveau, Japanese woodcuts, and Chinese prints, yet gave them a chilly Nordic elegance and a modernist look. The original paintings from these two volumes were exhibited in London in 1915 (book artists depended on the sales from such shows, for they earned very little from the published works), and then formed the core of a Nielsen exhibition in New York two years later.

In 1917, Kay traveled from New York back to Copenhagen and became, during the postwar years, deeply involved with the theater again. Collaborating with his close friend Johannes Poulson (now known as a pioneer of Danish cinema, but then a young stage actor and producer), he designed elaborate sets and costumes for Adam Oehlenschlaeger's *Aladdin* at the Danish State Theater, as well as for a lavish production of *Scaramouche,* with music by Sibelius. It was during these years, between 1918 and 1922, that the artist also created his sensual illustrations for *The Arabian Nights,* incorporating a melange of influences from Eastern art to the Italian Renaissance. Publication plans for the series fell through, but the paintings were shown in a London exhibition in 1924, along with new illustrations for a volume of Hans Christian Andersen tales.

Kay married his beloved, charismatic wife Ulla Pless-Schmidt in 1926, and for the next decade the two of them lived in grand style in Copenhagen where Kay, due to his popular books and innovative theater work, was now a celebrity just as his mother and father had been. In 1936, the theater work led to a prominent job in Hollywood, creating designs for Max Reinhardt's *Everyman* at the Hollywood Bowl. When this job was done, Kay stayed on in California at the request of Walt Disney to design the "Bald Mountain" sequence of the animated film *Fantasia.* When war broke out in Europe again, Ulla joined Kay in Hollywood and the couple settled in, with their two Scotty dogs, to a new life in America. At first, it was a life as luxurious as the one they'd left behind—but gradually, Kay's working relationship with Disney Studios deteriorated. And when he turned to his own art again, he found, to his astonishment and despair, it had fallen quite out of fashion.

Then began a long stretch of years where jobs were few and far between, and Kay's once highly sought after paintings became impossible to sell. "His disadvantage," writes Hildegarde Flanner, a friend and neighbor in southern California, "lay in the narrowness of his range in a day that was suspicious of fantasy, unless neurotic or Joycean, that the 'Golden Age of Illustration' in which his name had been notable along with those of Morris, Beardsley, Boecklin, Pyle, Rackham, Dulac, and their brotherhood had closed, and however vital his skill in decoration, he had no ease in self-promotion. In other times his talent and reputation might have carried him without anxiety for the rest of his life, yet already in the forties of the century and his own middle-fifties his successes, both European and American, were all in the past and apparently behind him, and he was living obscurely in a mortgaged cottage in the foothill suburbs, with no prospects ahead. Apprehension about money became chronic, and also there was the crucial matter of ill health. In spite of his tall appearance of well-

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By Bruce Holland Rogers
Illustration By Mahendra Singh

Sometimes the line between good and evil can be

The Djinn Who Lives

The djinn Al-faq lived in the crack between night and day. He rarely ventured out into the worlds of his fellow djinn, much less into the world of mortal men. No one but God and Al-faq himself knew whether or not he was a faithful djinn, so the obedient spirits and disobedient alike thought of him as one of their own. Djinn of both kinds visited Al-faq to tell him their stories.

Tayab, the djinn of ashes, came to the crack between night and day. Laughing, he called out, "Cousin! I have such a story to tell you!"

"What have you done now, Tayab?"

The djinn of ashes only laughed some more, so Al-faq said, "Well, come in, cousin, and have some tea. You must tell me your tale from the beginning."

When the tea was brewed, Tayab said, "Do you know the people of the red desert? The ones who live along the river?"

Al-faq gave no answer but nodded for Tayab to continue.

"The plague came to them," said the djinn of ashes. "Every house had its dead. You never heard such wailing! That was what drew me, cousin. The anguish of the living. All those lamentations carried on the wind … I know an opportunity when I hear one!"

Al-faq said, "Go on."

"From one house, I heard shrieks more terrible than all the rest. There a woman was tearing at her clothes, pulling out her hair. Her husband tried to hold her hands at her sides. He was crying, too, but not like her. His face was wet, but he was silent. Her arms and his were bloodied where she had scratched them. And her keening! Oh, I have seldom heard grief like hers. It was delicious," Tayab said, "because I was sure I could make something of it."

"Some mischief," said Al-faq. He sipped his tea.

"Better than mere mischief," said Tayab. "Now, listen. I sniffed around their house, and in seven places I found the shadow of the dark angel. Seven times during the plague he had entered and taken a soul. Children, I guessed. This woman had borne seven children, and now all of them were dead. When she was too spent to cry out, she whispered their names." He told Al-faq what the names of the children had been. "Her husband tried to comfort her. Useless. He said her name, and she would not answer. When he tried to meet her gaze, she turned away."

"His grief must have been as great."

"Perhaps, perhaps. Who can tell when they aren't loud like her, when they don't rend their clothes? So I waited until he was asleep. Her eyes were still wide open, though it was too dark for her to see. I knelt over her and I whispered, 'Mortal woman, I am the angel of the gate, and I have heard your prayers.'"

"The angel of the gate?" said Al-faq.

"It's nothing. I made it up. But I said to her, 'I will return your children to life if you will but keep faith with me.'"

"And if an angel hears of this?"

"But I didn't take the name of any angel, cousin. Didn't I just say that I made it up? I said to the woman, 'Get up. Go out. Walk west. Go until you can go no farther. I will give you a sign that your children have returned, but you must stay there by the sea, alone, with nothing. You must never speak again. You must never seek your children, for if you find one then all seven must die.'"

"And she agreed to this bargain?"

"She did! She got up without waking her husband. She took only the clothes she wore, and she walked! Day and night she walked! Out of the desert and over the mountains, all the way to the sea!"

"And you? Did you return her children to life?"

Tayab laughed. "Return them to life?" He held his sides and laughed some more. "Well, I did what I could, cousin. I did all that it was in my power to do. I came to her in the night and told her to look to the eastern sky. Stars fell from the heavens, and as each one fell, I gave it the name of one of her children."

as subtle and as obvious as the line between night and day.

Between Night and Day

"She believed you."

"Far better than believed me, cousin, and that is the sugar in the tea! I left her. And when I returned the next night, there she was within sight of the waves, sheltering in a cave in the cliffs! I said, 'Now, listen, mortal woman. I am no angel. I am a djinn. As for you, I have never met a greater fool, for I can no more restore your children to life than I can make the sun rise in the west. You don't need to stay here and starve beside the sea. Go home, now. Go home!'"

"And did she?"

"That's the wonder!" The djinn of ashes laughed once more. "She would not answer me, for I had told her that she must not speak. And she would not believe me, for I had told her that she must keep faith with the angel of the gate. So there she stayed, wordless, friendless, with only a cave for shelter, steady in her faith in a divine servant that does not exist!"

"But *you* exist, cousin."

"I do, to be sure," said Tayab with a grin.

"And did she starve?"

"Villagers by the sea found her. They bring her food. They think she is a holy woman." He laughed again.

"And what of her husband?"

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THE VEIL BEYOND THE VEIL

Life is a bitch, and then you die. And die, and die, and die and ...?

Emily Jean Gaines was murdered on the night of April 23, 200-, in the small town of H——F——, Indiana. She was 42 years old. Her last, absurd thought was frustration at having failed to return that copy of *Somewhere in Time* to the video store down Main Street. Her record there was bad enough already.

Emily woke up from having been murdered to find herself lying on a heap of trash in what seemed to be an alley in a big city. She flinched from the two men bending over her, but it turned out they weren't her assailants. She could see blue sky at the top of the narrow brick canyon; it had been dark outside when she was attacked.

The two young men introduced themselves as Mormon missionaries—they both had the same first name, Elder—and as they helped her up they asked if they could be the first to welcome her to Spirit Paradise, the land beyond the veil where departed souls await their Resurrection. This confused Emily. She felt as if she had awakened at the end of a long car trip which she had mostly missed by being asleep. She could hear city traffic close by, and she gingerly felt the back of her head. It was fine, perfectly solid, as was the rest of her. She didn't feel like she needed to await resurrecting.

BY WILLIAM SHUNN • ILLUSTRATION BY GREG CARTER

EMILY FOUND HERSELF THE UNWILLING DEFENSE OF

Emily let the handsome young missionaries assist her to the mouth of the alley; then she slipped away from them and lost herself in the crowds of pedestrians moving along the sidewalk. The first thing she noticed was the clothing people wore. She had never been very good at fashion, but even she could see that most of the clothes were years out of date. And that was just among the people wearing Western fashions. And they weren't a clear majority. The cars and trucks and taxis in the street seemed even more behind the times—as in decades.

The city itself seemed to resemble New York, which Emily had visited a couple of times with girlfriends early in college. Before dropping out to marry Dick, of course. Or *the* Dick, as some of her girlfriends had called him.

Where would she stay? How would she eat? At the thought of food, she realized she could smell meat frying, and other things as well, and she realized she was hungry. She followed her nose through the crowd to a vendor selling hot dogs, falafels, gyros, and knishes from a shaded stainless-steel cart. She searched her pockets vainly for money.

You're new, said the vendor. He was a middle-aged Arab with a short beard, wide smile, and white hat.

Emily was wearing the clothes she'd been killed in. They were contemporary—at least for when she had lived—if not particularly exciting or flattering.

Yes, Emily said.

You eat free, my treat, said the vendor. As he stuffed a fat sausage into a skinny bun and smothered it with sauerkraut and onions, he told her the old joke about the Zen Buddhist who went to the hot dog stand and said make me one with everything. Then the vendor directed her to the information kiosk at Straightway and 42nd Street, where she could get oriented.

It was only a few blocks away. When she arrived, she found a triangular island in the middle of the intersection, crowded with preachers and proselytizers of every stripe. There were Hare Krishnas and Hassidic Jews, Buddhists and Bahá'ís, Hindus and humanists and Wiccans and Rastafarians and Satanists and voodoo priests and faith healers and more, each propounding his or her own pet theory of what this place was and why they had all ended up there. (It's a traffic island, Emily thought wryly, and you got here by crossing the street.) Emily waved off mimeographed pamphlets left and right, and nervously skirted a gathering of angry black men from the Nation of Islam. An earnest young woman in a tailored polyester suit offered her a free personality test. At the kiosk itself, a bored man determined that Emily was Catholic and directed her to any of several cathedrals in the city where she could take Communion and make confession and get further religious instruction. After that, he had no more help to offer.

Emily forewent the nearby St. Patrick's Cathedral in favor of a smaller venue downtown, near Astral Place. It was nearing sundown when she arrived there, and she was in time for evening Mass. Afterward the priest, Father Tompkins, heard her confession. When she told him that she was guilty of cheating her company, he broke protocol by asking for details. When she explained that she had been at the office late the night of her murder because she was working on her personal Web site, hosted illegally on the company's server, he didn't understand what she was talking about. He finally absolved her gratis because she had obviously paid for that particular sin, whatever it meant, many times over already, what with getting killed and all.

Father Tompkins still thought of computers as boxes with blinking lights that filled a room and could only be appeased by a priesthood of punch-card operators. He had died during Kennedy's term, when Emily was still a child—an unhappy child, at that. He explained to her that technology in the city was exactly as advanced as the most recent arrivals could make it. By and large, Emily realized, the people who knew how to make personal computers and cellular phones and flat-screen TVs and weapons-grade anthrax, or who knew and cared to do it, were still alive in the First Estate (as Father Tompkins called the previous life). The priest also admitted that he wasn't sure how the place where they found themselves (the Second Estate?) fit into the Catholic conception of the cosmos. Was it heaven? limbo? purgatory? Who knew?

After confession and instruction, they turned to small talk. When Emily mentioned that she had done some accounting during her living years, Father Tompkins offered her a job helping with the books, along with a small room in the back of the rectory. She accepted, and that was where she lived for the next 11 years. She spent her free time exploring the city, or reading, but reading was frustrating at first because her favorite authors were mostly still alive. She frequently caught herself wishing that Danielle Steel would die, and felt guilty for it. More and more, though, she devoted her time to studying what she could of world religions, trying to make some sense of where she was and why, but no answers came. Occasionally she and Father Tompkins were hesitant lovers, which gratified her because she was a "big-boned" blonde who had never felt particularly attractive. The Dick, in fact, had liked to call her a cow, and had done so consistently for the six years prior to divorcing her.

So it was that, after 11 years of peace if not complete happiness at the rectory of St. Mark's, Emily forgot to look both ways before crossing Straightway and was run over by a bus.

People died in the Second Estate—that was the really interesting thing, though Emily had not seriously prepared herself for it to happen to herself, not again. When she awoke this second time, she was quicker to get oriented. The memory of blinding pain and diesel fumes was already fading like the residue of a dream. She sat up, the smell of damp vegetation and decay thick in her lungs. Streamers of mist threaded their way between closely spaced trees thick with vines and flowers. Birdcalls echoed through the air. She breathed in deeply. Maybe she had reached heaven now.

She stood, looked around, spotted a crimson snake slithering away through the undergrowth. The Garden of Eden, then? But she was still wearing the clothing she'd had on when she was struck. In the Garden of Eden, she would expect to be wearing skins, or fig leaves, or nothing at all. That last thought vaguely shamed her, and she set out to explore.

Before she had walked far, she could hear the murmur of distant voices, many of them, many thousand, drifting toward her through the jungle. In a few minutes more she broke through the foliage to find herself at the rim of a great green valley, thickly verdant, with hundreds of gray granite buildings nestled in the floor of its bowl. And people—oh my, all the people!

As she descended into the valley she passed people in brightly colored robes toiling among rows of vegetables and grains growing in terraces cut into the slope of the hill. Many smiled and waved as she passed. When she reached the city wall and passed beneath an arch covered with intricate carvings of feathered serpents, she found herself in a bustling marketplace where merchants hawked and haggled over everything from fabric to inks and quills, fresh breads and dried meats to bright jewels. Wooden carts pulled by animals that Emily

REGRETTING THE FACT THAT SHE HAD GIVEN UP HER FIRST LIFE IN SOMETHING NO MORE PROFOUND THAN A RURAL INSURANCE BROKERAGE.

thought might be oxen competed for space on narrow streets thronged with pedestrians.

She saw people of every race, though the predominant skin color was a coppery brown. Most all she saw wore robes dyed vivid tropical colors, and some had woven brilliant feathers or strands of gold or copper wire into their hair. The first several people she tried talking to answered in a strange guttural language, but eventually she ran across a fat black woman who spoke in musically accented English and who directed her to a small ziggurat near the center of the city.

Emily found the building late in the day. It was like a jagged pyramid built of blocky stone Legos, and she was welcomed by several men and women who spoke English with varying accents and degrees of archaity. The ziggurat, which turned out to house a makeshift hospital and clinic, was staffed by a fairly equal mixture of white, brown, and black faces, and Emily was offered a position on the condition that she would learn the lore of medicinal herbs and function as an acolyte in the priesthood of Ixtatcli, a local goddess of healing. Emily couldn't see any reason to refuse.

Emily studied hard during her first months, and she spent her free hours roaming the city and the surrounding fields, searching for any of the people she had known from the Second Estate who had passed on before her. She turned up nothing, though among the English speakers she did find a few who had passed through a city similar to the one in which she had spent her previous 11 years. At first, Emily feared she had somehow been misfiled by the cosmos, sidetracked on the proper route to whatever reward she was meant to attain, especially after she learned that many of the native speakers had come directly here from the First Estate. She might be lost in someone else's conception of heaven!

But then she met people for whom this was their third, fourth, or even fifth stop in the postmortal progression, and she reminded herself that no one understood the workings of these worlds, least of all her. She had to trust that it would all be sorted out in the end.

So she applied herself to the study and worship of Ixtatcli with renewed vigor and outshone her fellow acolytes in her mastery of the lore of healing herbs. She labored in the fields one day a week, like all her fellows, so as not to be a burden on the society she served, and she still found time to learn the ways of many of Ixtatcli's brothers and sisters. In the beauty of their doctrine of death, rebirth, and renewal, Emily found herself regretting the fact that she had given up her first life in the unwilling defense of something no more profound than a rural insurance brokerage. She wanted her next death to have more meaning than that. She wanted to give her life for something meaningful.

And so Emily Gaines lived for the next 87 years as a botanist, a healer, and a priestess. On her frequent forays into the jungle for flowers and roots and mosses, she ranged as widely as she could, trying to get a glimpse of what might lie beyond the seemingly endless foliage, but she consistently found herself circling back to her starting point, unaware that she was doing so. It was like the few times she had gone hunting for the bridges leading out of the city in her previous life; the streets always seemed to turn back on themselves, and there was no exit.

Emily died while helping one of the other healers, a herpetologist, milk the venom from a large black viper. The man would use the resulting product to create antivenin, which he would store in goats' bladders tied down in a nearby stream to keep it sufficiently cool to prevent quick spoilage. Emily had helped with this a hundred times before, but this time she was distracted by thoughts of the Dick. She was wondering, after all these years, where he was now, what circle of hell he might be roasting in, when the snake, a bigger one than usual, got away from her and sank its fangs into the meat of her thigh. The herpetologist tried to help, but the snake's fangs had pierced Emily's femoral artery, and a dull leaden feeling, like the aftermath of being stabbed with a giant pencil, began radiating out from the wound. Emily was not unhappy at the prospect of dying. She had lived a full, devoted life in this place, and she looked forward to whatever better and more exciting life awaited her next.

Emily awakened in a ditch in a dry, cracked desert land. An inch of half-dry mud lined the bottom of the ditch, remnant of some long-ago stream that no longer was. When she breathed, dust clogged her lungs. She stumbled to her feet, and through the blowing sand she could make out a white city in the distance, like something from a fairy tale. A rutted track passed near the ditch (more properly a wadi), and before she had made it a quarter-mile toward the city she was overtaken by two men in a chariot. They stopped, and when she asked them for a ride, conscious of how dirty her bright green robe had become in so short a time, they knocked her to the ground, beat her, raped her, took the gold wire from her hair and the copper bracelets from her wrists, and left her for dead.

Eventually Emily managed to crawl the rest of the distance to the city, bleeding and trailing one broken foot behind her. Several horsemen passed her on the road, and a few travelers on foot, but none would help her. She ended up begging for food and coins on the streets of the mostly Mongol city, and was occasionally reduced to turning tricks like the other blonde-haired women in the back alleys of the thieves' quarter, while her damaged foot slowly worsened. As she limped in excruciating pain from corner to corner, she wondered what she had done wrong in her previous life to merit this bitter treatment. Was it pride, or her evil thoughts about the Dick, or something else?

Emily resolved to try to endure her lot with patience and humility. And when nearly five miserable years had passed, when she was almost completely unable to walk due to the sickening of her leg, she contracted an intestinal bacterium by drinking from a dirty puddle in the street and took two weeks to die.

She awakened this time in some sort of war zone, where giant tanks rumbled past on treads as tall as a man, and soldiers of both sexes in spiked helmets rushed past through the muddy rain amid hails of gunfire and bright explosions. She was drafted into the conflict almost immediately. She performed courageously, never knowing what god it was she fought for or why, but still saving the lives of six of her comrades in the middle of an impossibly confused firefight. In the end, however, she lasted less than a week before stepping on a mine during a night patrol and being flung into her next life in a red particulate rain.

When Emily came to, she didn't understand why she was dressed like a soldier. In fact, she didn't understand much of anything, but the doctors who took her in when the police brought her to the hospital used words like muscular dystrophy and severe retardation when they talked in front of her. She understood almost nothing, except the fact that the couple

who eventually adopted her and who took her home to live with their other special children were both kind and good and loved her very, very much. They helped her learn to dress and feed herself, and to use the toilet like a big girl, and to pray to Odin, and they went to the park and sometimes the circus, which was fun. Emily lived happily with her family for the next 19 years, surrounded by love, until one night her heart finally gave out and she was gone.

She lived in a seemingly endless library, with infinite wings and levels stretching in all directions, for over four hundred years, doing little but reading works of history and philosophy and science and trying not to disturb the thousands of other patrons. Vast carvings of Jupiter, Apollo, Minerva, and Hermes stared down from every cornice and graced every landing. Her mind soared, set free from the encumbrances of her previous life until, finally, a vast fire swept through the library, and because there were no exits no one escaped alive.

For 36 years, Emily served as handmaid to a T'ang empress, who protected her from the attentions of the god emperor her husband as a reward for her devoted service. In her position, Emily was privy to countless vital diplomatic concerns and knew more state secrets than anyone save the emperor's closest advisers. More than once, in fact, the right words to the empress seemed to find their way into the emperor's ear, and Emily would be indirectly responsible for edicts that spared the nation or improved the lot of its citizens. One day, however, a clever and jealous adviser finally managed to place a few grains of a powerful neurotoxin in Emily's ginseng tea, and her years as one of the thousand servants at court were over.

She awakened in a land of rolling green hills, shaggy forests, and dank peat bogs. She quickly found work at an alehouse in a burgeoning town of a few thousand souls, and worked there for some years before a handsome stranger with a short dark beard, wide smile, and high riding boots stopped in for roast pig and wine. He did not belong in this country, and spoke with a strange lilt to his speech, but how could she fail to see the way his eyes followed her around the room, and how could she be so discourteous as to deny him when he sought her attention for a moment?

Do you not know me, American woman? said the stranger.

Emily cocked her head. Should I?

You were at my falafel stand not three months ago, said the stranger. You were new, I gave you a free sausage.

Emily narrowed her eyes. It had been centuries for her, but he did indeed strike her as familiar....

I remember you.

The stranger's smile seemed to widen to his ears. I have indeed found heaven, he said. The most beautiful woman ever to grace my humble stand, and now in this new life I find you with my pockets full of silver.

Anwar (because that was his name) had fallen asleep in his tub in the Second Estate and drowned not two weeks after Emily had arrived there. He had subsequently awakened and found himself one of the principals of a lucrative trading operation which transported spices and silks from distant lands.

But the nomadic life is not for me, he said. I long to settle down, and have my eye on a parcel of good land a few miles outside of town....

Anwar and Emily were married a week later, though it would be years before she overcame her embarrassment enough to admit to him that she had already lived through eight previous lifetimes, as opposed to his two. It was his evident goodness as much as his charmingly clumsy manner that convinced her to marry him so quickly. The Dick would probably have to toil through 30 lifetimes to reach this point.

They lived together on what started out as a farm in the countryside for 143 years, adopting a crude combination of Druidism and Christianity as their faith, and by the time they nodded off to sleep together one night and never drew another breath (at least in that world), a thriving, wealthy city had sprung up around them, christened after the couple's family name.

Emily lived the next seven years as a miner on an asteroid, growing to love her male comrades dearly but never succumbing to the constant temptation to take any of them to her bunk. The memory of Anwar's warm, dry hand in hers was far too fresh to allow that. She died along with 23 of the others when the redundant seals at the mouth of the mine blew out, sucking them all into space.

She served for 22 years as a priestess in a voodoo cult on a tropical island, before succumbing to a dry rot that might or might not have been the curse of a rival shaman.

After 14 years of hard labor in the high valleys of an alpine realm, she helped organize a peasants' revolt and died trying to free her people from their oppressors. She also died not knowing whether or not she had succeeded.

She woke from that experience to the cries of a small child who had tripped and fallen in the path of an oncoming train. She pushed the child out of harm's way just in time, but not so quickly that she made it across the tracks herself. She tripped, and the passing train severed her left leg below the knee. As she bled to death, she shook her head wearily, thinking that this one had just been too obvious.

She woke from that experience to the cries of a small child who had tripped and fallen in the path of an oncoming train. This time she was too far away to reach the child before the train did. After that, she wandered alone in a trackless wilderness for several days, with the empty tracks as the only landmark, before her thirst at last drove her to the ground. As she wept dry tears, she promised herself she would never try to second-guess this crazy afterlife again.

She lived 30 years as an advocate and then a judge in a break-off Jainish matriarchy high in the mountains, before dying of a fever contracted from a sick trader.

She lived seven years as a tutor in a small nomadic society in the Arctic, instructing bewildered new arrivals in the ways of the local gods.

For 49 years she mashed straw into bricks, which the Overlords then used to entomb their dead and revered Commissar. She and her people were forced to worship their own god in secret, but one evening she was caught in the act and disemboweled.

AMID THIS GLORY EMILY DRIFTED, A PINPRICK IN IN HER OWN INSIGNIFICANCE—BUT NOT, SHE

She awakened in deep space, millions of light-years above the plane of the Milky Way, or a galaxy very much like it, without a spacesuit and with no oxygen to breathe. I've already died this way once, she thought in exasperation, but this time she wasn't caught so much by surprise, and had time to contemplate the majesty of the spiral galaxy below before her blood boiled and she asphyxiated.

She served for 27 years as a priestess in the cult of Ishtar, whom male worshipers would approach through the act of love, consummated with Emily or another member of her sisterhood. She was so far beyond the concerns of her original lifetime by this point that she hardly registered the irony of the fact that a girl who had once been tortured with taunts like Gaines Burger and Emily Gaines Weight Daily was now sought after as a sex object by men of all ages.

One day she welcomed to the holy of holies a seeker whom she recognized dimly as one of the men who had murdered her in her State Farm office all those many centuries ago. He and his partner had broken in after midnight, thinking the place would be empty, and when Emily surprised them they had beaten her head in with a crowbar. She made no sign that she knew the man now, only drew him down to the couch and silently forgave him.

Near the end of those years, when invaders arrived with angry new puritanical gods, this man stood up as one of the defenders of the temple of Ishtar. He fell shortly before she did, comrades slain by the advance of monotheism.

A hundred other lifetimes passed, or a thousand, some as men, or animals, or trees, but most as women, and all as herself.

The joy and agony of each new rebirth was indescribable.

Each brought her to a world where she felt a little more alone than in the last.

And then, in one certain lifetime, she *was* alone. Utterly.

After years of wandering in perfect solitude in a vast land where there was only fruit to eat and her own thoughts for contemplation, she was greeted by a voice.

Emily, it said.

Emily turned without surprise and saw an old woman standing at the mouth of a cave.

Yes, said Emily.

Welcome, said the old woman.

Are you God? asked Emily.

I'm a seeker like you, said the old woman. I stand without the final veil.

Emily's heart quickened. Are you here to lead me through it? she asked.

I'm here to point the way, and perhaps to follow at some point.

Emily pointed to the mouth of the cave. Is that the way?

It is.

I have so many questions for you, said Emily.

I have few answers, no more than you have.

But why?

The old woman sighed. Why the multitude of lives and experience? she said. Why the seeming randomness of your progression? Why the steady decay in population at each level? Why the pain, the suffering, the agony?

Yes, why?

You may as well ask why the joy. I don't know. I don't know if there is a plan or design behind all this. I don't know if these lifetimes are real, or if they're merely constructs of our minds manufactured to protect our sanity until we're strong enough to see through to the true nature of the universe. In fact, that is what I fear, though I still don't know myself to be correct.

But why fear the true nature of things? asked Emily, though in her bones she thought she knew.

Come, said the old woman, beckoning. Look into the cave.

Emily approached the mouth of the cave, which was as dark as pitch—darker, even. Light seemed to *fall* into it, and none of it escaped. Emily sensed limitless depth inside the cave, and breadth and height, and time as well. And perhaps more dimensions than those.

This is the final veil, said the old woman. Or so I believe.

Do you guard it? asked Emily, stalling.

No. I wait. I've never summoned the courage to pass through.

With what she suspected, Emily saw how tempting it would be to falter at this point. We'll go through together, she said. Now.

I know little, said the old woman, but I know that each of us must pass alone.

Then I'll pass now, said Emily. Before her courage could wane.

God be with you, my sister, said the old woman, but the words sounded somehow hollow.

You also, said Emily, and stepped through the mouth of the cave into nothingness.

The world she left behind seemed to turn flat and unconvincing, like a painted scrim, as she passed through the veil. And then ....

Stars.

Her first impression was of stars—millions of them, some clustered nearby like fat diamonds, others spread around her like crushed glass in every direction. And enfolding them all, a great rainbow-hued cloud of dust and gas, blotting out the heavens like God's cast-off cloak, lit from the inside. Amid this glory Emily drifted, a pinprick in space, significant only in her insignificance—but not, as she soon realized, alone.

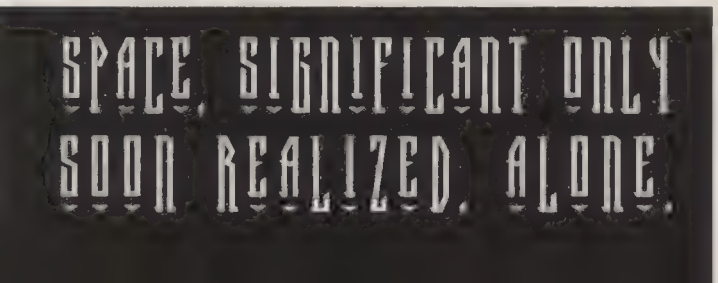
Even as she began to comprehend the blazing yellow star that was her nearest companion in this stellar nursery, she felt her consciousness flatten and diffuse, spreading out like a spinning platter into the orbital plane of the young star. As she felt the touch of the star's warm, dry light on her tenuous surface, a wave of ancient emotion surged through her.

Anwar?

As if in answer, a new vista opened to her mind, and she moved through every instant of this life, past, present, and future, as if all time were laid out around her like a deck of transparent cards, start to finish. She felt the slow force of gravity sweep her together into a disk of accretion as she circled her companion, felt her spherical surface cool and harden even as her molten core continued to seethe, even as the occasional twitch of her skin opened great rifts and threw up mountains where none had been. Moisture condensed and collected in her great valleys, and her star's pulsing energy combined with her own substance to bring forth life—her children, the first she had ever borne. She watched them divide and multiply, taking shapes she had never imagined, until they covered her face, until the pressure of their own ubiquity forced them out of the cradle, and she felt the terrible ache as they said goodbye and left.

And there, far down at the end of time, she watched the once-bright star of her firmament, her only star, burn himself to a black cinder, and as he collapsed into himself he reached out to draw her tired husk to him and crush her in a last exquisite embrace.

She experienced every moment simultaneously and eternally, with what she at last recognized as the perspective of a god. If anything lay beyond that final singularity, she could not see it, but as for this life, she saw that it was good, and she rested. ❧



books

Continued from page 39

In his retirement, Price's generosity and camaraderie extended to writing profiles of all the friends he had outlived. These fascinating memoirs, nearly 20 of them, are now collected in one volume for our delight. And delights they do provide.

Price was an earthy, salty, life-loving character, fond of good food, good wine, and endless conversation, with a prose style to match—kind of a less excitable Henry Miller. He pulls no punches in his word-portraits, detailing the warts and crotchets of his old friends, as well as their virtues and good deeds. Under his hand we vivdly experience the dusty Texas life of Conan's creator and walk the streets of Providence with Lovecraft, just to focus on two of his topics.

But most amazing are the chapters devoted to the utterly forgotten ones, pulp writers such as Hugh Rankin, Harry Olmstead, Milo Phelps, and others. Once these men were at the top or solid middle of their fields, earning good money and the respect of their peers. Now they are less than footnotes—except in the memory of Price, who cherished them all and here restores their lost individuality.

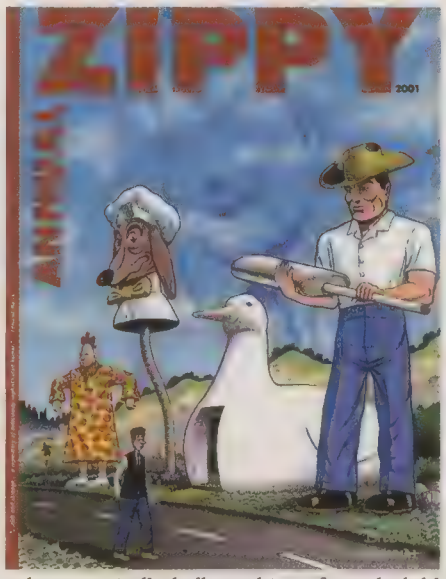
And of course this book also serves as a partial autobiography for Price himself. We emerge from the final page with a solid grasp of Price's nature, feeling almost as if we had spent many hours in his reputedly dynamic presence. Just like the classic Oriental rugs he collected, Price's work is made with care and meant for the ages.

Ill Met By Moonlight, *Sarah Hoyt; Ace Books, NY; hardcover; 278 pp.; $21.95.*

Newcomer Sarah Hoyt bestows upon us a very capable and entertaining first novel, one which mixes Shakespeare and elvish politics to good effect. Compact in scope, modest in conception and presentation, this book nevertheless succeeds on a number of levels, portraying both its human characters and its Faerie denizens in depth, fashioning believable relations between the mortal and eldritch camps, and sustaining suspense right up till the climax.

Nineteen-year-old Will Shakespeare, newly married to Nan and father to Susannah, is working as a humble, underpaid schoolteacher when we first meet him. Arriving home one weary day at dusk, he discovers that Nan and Susannah are missing. Shortly he learns that they have been abducted by the King of Faerie, Sylvanus. Son of Oberon and Titania, Sylvanus has previously murdered his parents and stolen the throne from the rightful heir, his brother Quicksilver.

Quicksilver, seeing an opportunity to regain his birthright, befriends Will and enlists him in a scheme to assassinate



Sylvanus. Will shall get his wife and child back, and Quicksilver can reclaim the throne. But neither man reckons with various affairs of the heart, both in the mortal realm and the Faerie court. Nor does Quicksilver give proper attention to the Hunter, an ancient god with his own plans for Faerie royalty. In the end, every Jack gets his Jill, but not in the manner anyone planned.

Hoyt sketches Shakespeare's family in authentic, empathetic detail, providing portraits of shrewish mother and ineffectual father which make Will's dilemma even more impactful. Her elvish characters are suitably otherworldly, especially Quicksilver, who has the disconcerting ability to morph from male to female at will. Yet their emotions synergize with humanity's on a number of intriguing levels. Nan also comes across as not a mere victim, but a strong and willful woman of some inner resources.

Employing famous lines from the Shakespearian canon as Faerie dialogue, Hoyt slyly gives us many frissons. Her period custom of high speechifying during vigorous swordplay rings true as well. And her evocation of Elizabethan daily life hits home. Her pleasant prose suffers only from an excess of metaphors, at time coming so thickly as to distract from the action.

Ill Met By Moonlight joins Poul Anderson's *A Midsummer Tempest* (1974) and Lisa Goldstein's *Strange Devices of the Sun and Moon* (1993) in that select company of novels relating pixilated Elizabethan adventures.

The Crow Maiden, *Sarah Singleton; Cosmos Books, PA; trade paper; 236 pp.; $15.00.*

Curiously enough, the currents of publishing immediately bring us a second book by a woman named Sarah that also concerns the eruption of Faerie into our terrestrial world. But this time around the action takes place in the present, is much more somber and darker in a thoroughly modern fashion, and climaxes in ways that approach tragedy—or at least a more nebulous and unsatisfying resolution for all the parties.

A young couple named Katherine and Paul live edgily in a small English village. Unmarried partners, they have given birth to a daughter, Niamh. But stay-at-home Katherine is unfulfilled, Paul hates his job and feels he's lost sight of his old dreams, and their charmingly old-fashioned town itself is under threat of being radically remade for the worse, as the government plans a new highway straight through old sacred grounds. Arrayed against these plans are a motley lot of protestors—squatters, mountebanks, and some gypsy-like "travelers." Both Katherine and Paul sympathize with these rebels, while at the same time feeling wary of jeopardizing their toehold on middle-class security.

One night Katherine goes for an impulsive walk and meets a new outsider on the fringes of the protest encampment. The young woman calls hereself merely "Crow," and offers Katherine some strange tea. The merest sip of this brew irrevocably plunges Katherine—and subsequently her husband and daughter—into a struggle between the forces of Faerie and the worst side of mankind. Katherine eventually will have to journey into the Faerie realm itself to regain any security for her family and the village. Paul will face a succubus masquerading as his wife and, like Will Shakespeare in the Hoyt volume, find himself seduced by her otherness. Strange Midsummer revels will conceal arson and assignations, and other characters on the edge of the whirlpool will find themselves changed forever.

Singleton's prose is a well-tempered, finely honed instrument that does not exclude a certain delicacy of touch. Her descriptions of the English countryside are lush and poetic, evoking the sanctity around which so many issues revolve. Her depictions of Katherine and Paul are balanced and mature, with neither partner emerging as 100 percent hero or 100 percent villain. Such secondary characters as Katherine's friend Elaine, the Gothboy Jo, and the wanderer Owain all strike me as utterly believable. Singleton has a sharp sense of what it's like to live outside the mainstream of society.

Here major accomplishment is her analysis and explication of how Faerie and our world interrelate. As Katherine learns while crossing the surreal landscape of Faerie, the fey ones are the dreamside of creation, while mankind is its consciousness, and neither one can exist without the other. Restoring the modern imbalance is the root motivation of these otherworldly intruders.

Reminiscent of the exemplary work of Graham Joyce, Singleton's fine novel also harks back to the allegories of George MacDonald—*Phantastes* (1858) and *Lilith* (1895)—in its rigorously stern approach to the land beyond the fields we know.

Paul Di Filippo

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By Eric T. Baker

Pirates, vampires, and the Forsaken take sides in new paper and dice RPGs.

Sorcerer, the new paper and dice role-playing game from Adept Press, is the best dramatic RPG since *Unknown Armies*. It shares *UA*'s concern for telling good stories and counting the cost of the character's actions, but unlike *UA*, *Sorcerer* does not have a single, canonical background. The conceit in *Sorcerer* is that the characters' powers are provided by demons who are bound to them, but the game is so flexible that these demons can represent anything from classical demons to new-age spirits to high-tech implants.

Wizards of the Coast's new Wheel of Time *RPG lets you live out the adventures of your favorite characters from Robert Jordan's novels.*

Characters in *Sorcerer* have four statistics: Stamina, used for physical tests; Willpower, used for mental tests; Lore, used for magic tests; and Humanity, which is used to count the cost of the characters' actions. The dice mechanic is simple and elegant. Players roll a number of dice equal to their characters' governing statistic and compare it with the GM's roll, high die to high die, next highest to next highest, and on down the line. The player with the highest high die wins, and the number of his or her dice that beats the other player's highest die is the number of victories. Thus, if the player rolls 6, 5, and 2 and the GM rolls 4, 3, 3, and 1, then the player wins with two victories. In continuing actions, victories carry over from previous tests as extra dice to roll, so success can build on itself. More importantly, bonus dice are added for good role playing, cool descriptions, and plot-advancing actions. Thus, players can overcome their characters' shortcomings and produce great things from them by focusing on the character and the story and being rewarded with needed extra dice.

The demon conceit and the elegant mechanics make *Sorcerer* a good game. What makes it a great game is Ron Edwards' writing, which inspires players to create the best possible game world for themselves and then revel in it. All gamers would rather play in their own worlds, but lack of time and fear of failure send most to prepackaged worlds and backgrounds. Edwards' writing not only makes campaign creation seem doable, but the *Sorcerer* system requires so little book keeping that there is actually time to do it. There are nonplayer characters and backgrounds for campaigns available on the *Sorcerer* Web site (www.sorcerer-rpg.com), but greatness of the game is that players won't need them.

Another paper and dice RPG without a canonical background is *Swashbuckler* from Jolly Roger Games. By the above criteria, *Swashbuckler* is a not a great game, but it does contain a great mechanic. It is intended to model the world of heroic fiction as depicted in *Robin Hood*, *Captain Blood*, and *The Princess Bride*, the last particularly for the Duel at the Cliffs of Madness. That duel is a sort of Holy Grail for gamers who would love all their combats to be as entertaining. *Swashbuckler* comes as close to capturing the energy and complexity of that movie's classic sword duel as any game that has tried.

The heart of the game is the combat maneuver skills and the combat matrix. For tests, players roll an attribute die plus the number of six-sided dice equal to their skill level. When dueling, the player selects a maneuver his or her character knows, and that maneuver is cross-referenced with the maneuver

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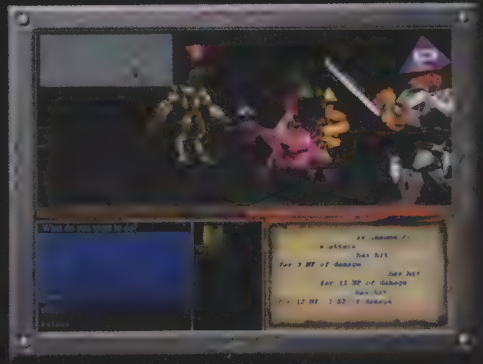

selected by the opponent. This yields a modifier to the player's roll, the high score hitting and getting the chance to score damage. Simple enough, but the key is that each maneuver chosen limits which maneuver can be chosen next. For example, a character that does a Lunge one round may not do another the next. Instead, the character must select Ready, the maneuver that lets characters gather themselves. Characters who Thrust one round have the option to Hasty Parry, Slash, or Ready the next round, and if they Slash, then they can perform a variety of maneuvers next. The tradeoff is that Lunge gets much better modifiers against most maneuvers than does a mere Thrust. The system is easy to learn, simple to use, and creates wonderful, exciting, cinematic combats.

The rest of the *Swashbuckler* system is not a match for the combat system. It is serviceable, but very bare-boned. There are rules for gun combat, ship-to-ship combat, and magic, but the details that will crop up during actual play are left to the GM. There is a brief introductory adventure, but the NPCs are left to the GM to stat up. This is too bad as some example characters would help set a baseline for campaigns. There is a chart of known maneuvers for various generic character types (ruffians, king's men, etc.) that is very helpful, though.

On the theme of swashbuckling, *Tangled Strands*, an adventure module for the *7th Sea* paper and dice RPG from AEG, provides lots of occasion for duel and derring-do in its 48 pages. Set in Castille and Vodacce, *7th Sea's* stand-ins for Spain and Italy, the players encounter a pair of lovers who take turns being the quest objects as the players stage daring rescues and battle evil henchmen on their way to a final confrontation with a dark mastermind. It is all good, over-the-top, crowd-pleasing stuff, made particularly hard by the mastermind's access to a Fate Witch. Magic in *7th Sea* is nation-based, and the Vodacce Fate Witches are the subtlest and thus the hardest to play. In a good GM's hands, though, they become the justification for all sorts of interesting twists and turns in the adventure.

TS is divided into four chapters that are intended to be interspersed into a campaign rather than following hard on each other. With that in mind, GMs would do well to see if they

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can dispense with the lovers offered by the module and substitute the characters in their own party. All that is needed to do so is a character with a love interest (all the better if that character is also in the party) and a nemesis and the plot translates nicely. If there were a way to translate *Swashbuckler*'s dueling system to the *7th Sea* game just as easily, then each game would be markedly improved.

One more paper and dice RPG without a canonical background is the *Dungeons & Dragons* parody, *Hackmaster,* from Kenzer & Company. The latest book for the game is the *Hackmaster GM Guide*, a massive 368-page tome dedicated to the comedic premise, "How can the GM screw the players ... fairly?" The joke is that everything is fair as long as it is in the rule book so that if a magic-user fumbles his casting role and ends up losing his memory of the last three years, that is fair because the GM rolled that result on the Spell Mishap Table. Amnesia is just one of 400 entries on that particular table.

Anyway, to make the game as "fair" as possible, *HM* tries to have a table, or at least a rule, for everything. The table of contents is five pages of very small type and is followed by a four-page listing of tables in just as small type. *HM* can actually be played, but it is funny enough just be read for things like the listing of hirelings (dancing girl troupes come in Human, Elven, half-Eleven, and half-Orc, each with their own stats and powers), the 700 magic items ("many cursed," the back cover proudly proclaims), and the Revised Smartass Smackdown Table (the original [reprinted inside] only had 10 entries, nine of which were "Immediate Death").

So much for games without a canonical background. The background of the new *Wheel of Time* paper and dice RPG from Wizards of the Coast is not only canon, it is also licensed. Based on the books of Robert Jordan, who wrote the introduction and had approval over the book, *WoT* lets players

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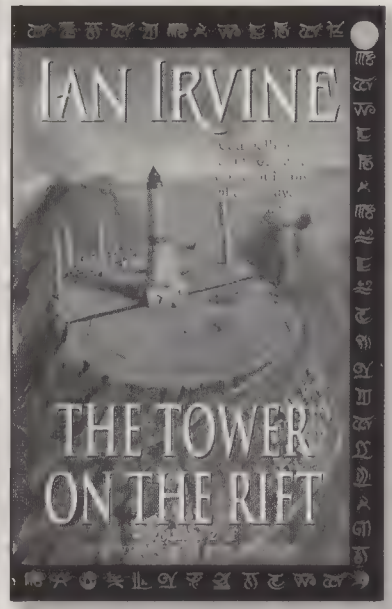

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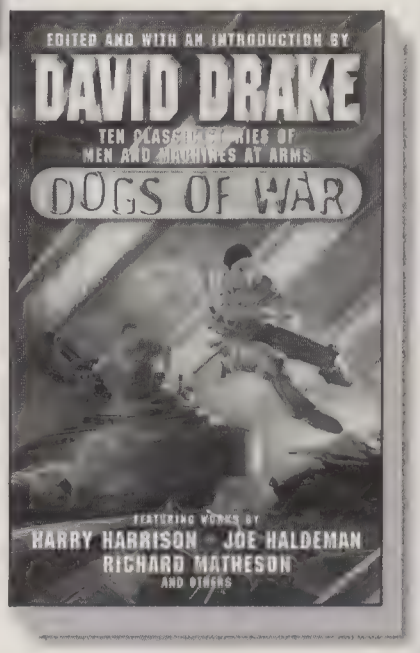

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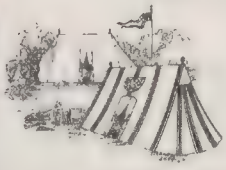

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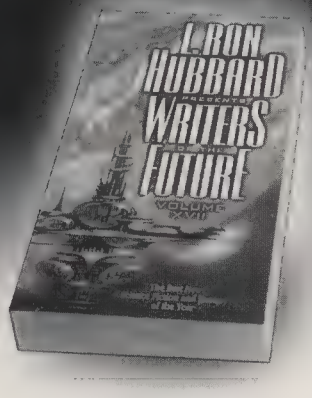

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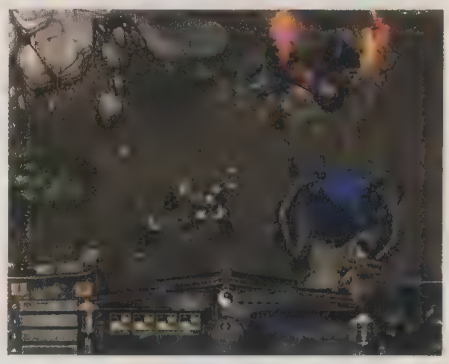
adventure in the world of Trollocs and Myrddraal using a version of the D20 system. The book is 300 pages of rules for play and background for the world. Like the excellent *Star Wars* RPG, *WoT* has writeups and stats for all the major characters, plus lists of equipment, maps of cities, monsters, weapons, and an introductory scenario. Jordan fans who have never played an RPG before and who pick up this game will have everything they need to not only play the game, but also learn the hobby.

Fans of the books will find some small changes. The loose, plot-driven magic of the books has been more codified and explained for ease of play, although it remains looser than in standard *D&D*. As in the books, men who use magic risk madness. The only seeming outright omission is the lack of a statted up entry for at least one of the Forsaken. Most likely they are being reserved for the an upcoming supplement and in the meantime there are plenty of villains and threats in the book to get a campaign started and to keep it going.

White Wolf didn't invent canonical backgrounds in RPGs, but they did perfect them. Their latest supplement is *New York by Night,* a City Source Book for Vampire: the Masquerade. New York is such a huge city, both physically and psychically, it is amazing to realize that this is the first *Vampire* supplement set there. It is not the book players may be expecting, in more ways than one.

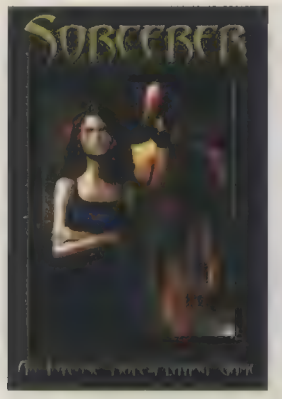
First, it is very low powered. *NYbN* does not see Gotham as the seat of various world spanning conspiracies, nor does it envision the Five Boroughs as populated by ancient and powerful vampires. New York is portrayed as a place for young, worldly vampires—those who seek to embrace change and its rewards rather than those secure in the old ways. This is a cool and believable vision of the Kindred society in the city.

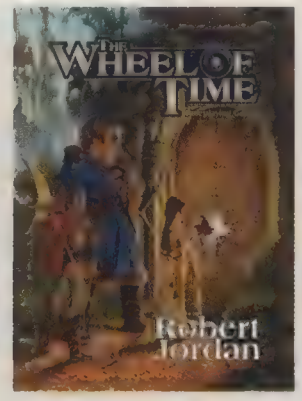


Second, while the book is dominated by 50 pages of descriptions (and stats!) of the Kindred in New York, the authors didn't attempt to include all 200 of the vampires that could comfortably live in the city. Nor did the authors skimp on the history of the vampires in the city or leave out descriptions of all parts of the city, with maps, including one of the subway. No book about New York can describe the city completely, but *NYbN* does a terrific job. Stories, settings, and characters abound, which is what a *by Night* book is supposed to deliver.

Leaving the world of paper and dice, *Fighting Legends* from Maximum Charisma Studios is a massive, multiplayer, online, squad-based RPG. Like the other MMORPGs on the market it is $9.95 a month, and like the others it involves going on quests and going up levels and gathering resources. What is different about *FL* is that the players control a party rather than a single character. There is an Avatar who stands in for the player and the size of the party he can control increases with his level. Parties are built from nine different clans, each with five different subtypes. The key to the game is mixing and matching the subtypes to get the best balance of powers and abilities.

Graphically, *FL* seeks an anime feel, so that characters and objects and locations are bright





and colorful rather than detailed and realistic. Starting the game is more like stepping into a cartoon than stepping off the players' front porch. The game is rated Teen, but is clearly intended for everyone as there is no blood and filters keep all the bad language from being typed between players. And typing is required. Many of the game's quests can't be completed without help, and the quests need to be finished to capture enough resources to keep the player's party competitive.

Technically, *FL* is very stable. The hardest part of playing seems to be getting an account established, but once that is done, there are few problems. The support staff is not only quick to respond, but even seeks out new players to see if they are getting the hang of the game. That feature alone might be worth the price of admission.

Battle Realms from Ubi Soft is a real-time strategy game set in an Asian-based fantasy world that owes a lot of its inspiration to Hong Kong Kung Fu movies. The player takes the role of the leader of either the Dragon or the Snake clan. Starting with a village of peasants, the player creates an army by putting some peasants to work gathering rice and building dojos and workshops, and some to work learning to be soldiers. The sort of training offered varies with each clan, but basically each has three sorts of basic training that produce three sorts of basic unit. Once a basic unit has been trained, however, it can be sent to one of the other basic training rooms to be come an advanced unit. And when that is done, it can be sent on to the final training to become a very advanced unit. And those very advanced units can be sacrificed to create heroic units. It is a very interesting spin on the RTS formula.

Combat in *BR* is amazing. The animations steal from the Hong Kong movies both in moves and speed. Units don't face off in line, they mingle and whirl among one another in melees that are as beautiful to watch as they are hard to control. The AI in *BR* is very good, which is needed because it is nearly impossible to manage a unit once it is fighting. In battles between large forces that more than fill the screen, it is impossible. Player line up their forces as best they can and then let them go.

In skirmish mode, *BR* allows players to command any of the four clans, even the two that are only enemies in the campaign game. It also has an online mode that allows players to skirmish with other people over the Internet. It is in these battles that the ability to combine forces and deploy the extras and special abilities available to each clan really tells. ❧

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Continued from page 63

give you the only Prince I can find, a direct descendant of the Count of Edinburgh, himself descended from the Tudors, albeit in the female line. Of course, all such titles have been abolished. This is, after all, the Socialist Union of Britannia. If Harry knows he is a Prince, he certainly isn't telling Mike or Steve, who might sell him out for a pack of American cigarettes. Even Madge can't be trusted, though they've been sharing a flat in the commune's apartment building for three years. Hell, she made a big enough fuss about the distillery business.

The bulldozer's roar grows louder, then turns into a whine. The front wheel is stuck in a ditch. Harry climbs down and looks at the wheel. Damn, he'll have to get Mike and Steve. He kicks the wheel, kicks a tree trunk and almost gets his foot caught in a briar, kicks the wheel again.

Something flashes in the forest. Now what the hell is that? (You and I know it is sunlight flashing from the faceted upper window of the tower.) Harry opens his beer and swallows a mouthful of its warm bitterness. Some damn poacher walking around on his land. (You and I remember that it belongs to the Socialist Union of Britannia.) He takes a bite of his liver and onion sandwich. Madge shouldn't frown so much, he thinks, remembering her in her housecoat, standing by the kitchen sink. She's getting wrinkles on her forehead. Should he fetch Mike and Steve? But the beer in his stomach, warm, bitter, tells him that he doesn't need Mike and Steve, because he can damn well handle any damn poacher himself. He bites into the gherkin.

Stay away, Prince Harry. Stay away from the forest full of briars. The Princess is not for you. You will never stumble up the tower stairs, smelling of beer; never leave a smear of mingled grease and sweat on her mouth; never take her away (thinking, *Madge's rump is getting too damn broad*) to fry your liver and onions and empty your ashtray of cigarette butts and iron your briefs.

At least, I hope not.

XII. *The Rose*

Let us go back to the beginning: petals fall. Unpruned for a hundred years, the rosebush has climbed to the top of the tower. A cane of it has found a chink in the tower window, and it has grown into the room where the Princess lies. It has formed a canopy over her, a network of canes now covered with blossoms, and their petals fall slowly in the still air. Her nightgown is covered with petals: this summer's, pink and fragrant, and those of summers past, like bits of torn parchment curling at the edges.

While everything in the palace has been

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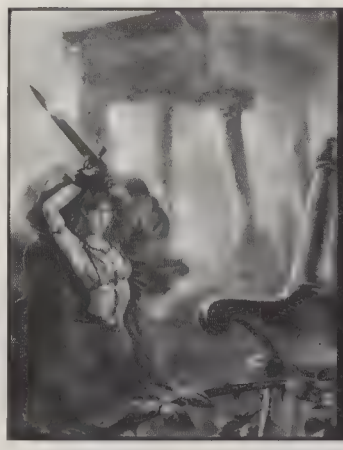
suspended in a pool of time without ripples or eddies, it has responded to the seasons. Its roots go down to dark caverns which are the homes of moles and worms, and curl around a bronze helmet that is now little more than rust. More than two hundred years ago, it was rather carelessly chosen as the emblem of a nation. Almost a hundred years ago, Madeleine plucked a petal of it for her magic spell. Wolfgang Magus picked a blossom of it for his buttonhole, which fell in the chapel and was trampled under a succession of court heels and cavalry boots. A spindle was carved from its dead and hardened wood. Half a century ago, a dusty hound urinated on its roots. From its seeds, dispersed by birds who have eaten its orange hips, has grown the tangle of briars that surround the palace, which have already torn the Prince's work pants and left a gash on his right shoulder. If you listen, you can hear him cursing.

It can tell us how the story ends. Does the Prince emerge from the forest, his shirtsleeve stained with blood? The briars of the forest know. Does the Witch lie dead, or does she still sit by the small-paned window of her cottage, contemplating a solitary pearl that glows in the wrinkled palm of her hand like a miniature moon? The spinning wheel knows, and surely its wood will speak to the wood from which it was made. Is the Princess breathing? Perhaps she has been sleeping for a hundred years, and the petals that have settled just under her nostrils flutter each time she exhales. Perhaps she has not been sleeping, perhaps she is an exquisitely preserved corpse, and the petals under her nostrils never quiver. The rose can tell us, but it will not. The wind sets its leaves stirring, and petals fall, and it whispers to us: you must find your own ending.

This is mine. The Prince trips over an oak log, falls into a fairy ring, and disappears. (He is forced to wash miniature clothes, and pinched when he complains.) Alice stretches and brushes the rose petals from her nightgown. She makes her way to the Great Hall and eats what is left in the breakfast dishes: porridge with brown sugar. She walks through the streets of the village, wondering at the silence, then hears a humming. Following it, she comes to a cottage at the village edge where Madeleine, her hair now completely white, sits and spins in her garden. Witches, you know, are extraordinarily long-lived. Alice says, "Good morning," and Madeleine asks, "Would you like some breakfast?" Alice says, "I've had some, thank you." Then the Witch spins while the Princess reads Goethe, and the spinning wheel produces yarn so fine that a shawl of it will slip through a wedding ring.

Will it come to pass? I do not know. I am waiting, like you, for the canary to lift its head from under its wing, for the Empress Josephine to open in the garden, for a sound that will tell us someone, somewhere, is awake. ❧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djinn

Continued from page 77

"That's not my story, cousin. He still lives, I suppose, if he has not yet died."

"I wonder about him."

Tayab waved the thought away. "But what do you think? I took everything from her, even more than I intended! And now even if I try to return what I stole, she won't take it! Have you ever heard of thievery such as mine?"

Al-faq stroked his face with his long fingers and gave no answer. Perhaps Tayab expected none.

When the djinn of ashes had gone, Al-faq left his home in the crack between night and day. He went to the world of mortal men. It took him a long time to find the red desert and even longer to find the house with seven now-fading shadows. The fields next to the house were overgrown. The man who lived there was hollow-eyed and thin.

Al-faq waited for nightfall. When at last the man fell into his bed, he moaned his wife's name. Al-faq leaned close in the darkness and said, "'Mortal man, I am the angel of the gate, and I have heard your prayers. As you feared, your wife, like your children, is dead. I will return them all to life if you will but keep faith with me."

"Yes?" said the man. "You can do this?"

"Get up," said Al-faq. "Go out. Walk south. Walk until you can go no farther. I will give you a sign that your wife and children have returned to life, but you must stay there by the sea, alone, with nothing. You must never speak again. You must never seek the ones you love, for if you find one, then all eight must die."

The man got up. He threw on his clothes. He took up his walking stick and set out at once. Through the night he walked. He walked through the next day. In time, he crossed the desert. In time, he crossed the plains. Al-faq, invisible, came behind him. When the man had walked all the way to the sea, the djinn waited for nightfall and then showed him eight falling stars in the northern sky. To each falling star, Al-faq gave a name.

"Remember," said the djinn. "Never speak. Never look for them."

The man's face was wet with tears. He nodded.

"Keep faith with me always, no matter what."

The man nodded again and smiled wearily. He made a gesture of gratitude, of blessing.

"No, do not bless me," said Al-faq. "I am not worthy."

At the nearest village, the djinn went from house to house and whispered in the ears of many sleepers: "There is a holy man beside the sea. Find him. Care for him."

Then the djinn Al-faq, who perhaps is a faithful djinn and perhaps is not, returned to the crack between night and day. And if the world has not yet ended, he lives there still.❧

Continued from page 21

an individual rune sign, its name, and the object or concept embodied by it.

My rather free translation derives from the original Anglo-Saxon poem, references from several unattributed secondary sources, as well as the translation by Bruce Dickins found in *Runic and Heroic Poems.* I have included here only the first 24 poems for the original letters of the runic alphabet (the complete Anglo-Saxon poem contains additional stanzas, as runes were added to reflect changes and additions to the basic alphabet).

But what in the world does the poem mean? Well, the poem's meaning largely depends on what specifically you wish to know. Would you learn of letters? Here are all their names and shapes displayed. Perhaps you're interested in the ideas and metaphors associated with each letter and a way to remember them? Here are their names translated into *ice, sun, day,* and *hail*—things that reside about you all the time, making memory easy. Would you ask what things are most important in the early Northern world-view? Here are objects and feelings and states of being. Do you wish to know the future? Are you sure? Odin always looked to the future and never seemed to like what he found there. But if you're brave, here are runes of fate. Choose one.

The poem is essentially (and perhaps necessarily) mysterious. This was most likely part of the intention of the original authors, but the poems may also have grown more obscure through time. This ambivalence of meaning is important. It allows for questions and encourages readers or listeners to bring something of themselves to the table of interpretation. The obscurity of the poem is almost certainly related to our own distance from the time of its origin, but there is always the possibility that we may, through careful and creative consideration, unlock its hidden meanings. While runes often *supply* answers to questions (as memorials, recording the ancient events of a specific place), rune poems make us want to *ask* questions. With the rune for HORSE we may ask, what does it mean to travel upon the land, considering the progression of place quickly, in succession, like an unfolding tapestry? Why is the rune for SUN so closely associated with the sea? Is this an observation of a seafaring people only? Or may it also refer to the habits of ancient gods, the Sun-father, the Sea-mother, and their personal felicitations? Whatever our interpretations, the rune poem—and indeed, the runes themselves—help us to heed history and the song of the soil, to observe carefully and closely the living world around us, to remember those that have gone before, and to travel with intention out upon the storied lands, leaving our marks, our stories, for those who will follow. ❧

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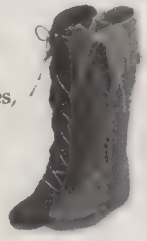

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kay nielsen

Continued from page 75

being, Kay was not strong and Ulla, since no one dares be sick without plenty of cash, did not mention the fact that she was threatened with diabetes."

Ulla and Kay tightened their belts, moved into a modest cottage near Flanner, and set about living with as much gentle grace and style as they could muster on a small and dwindling income. It was then that Flanner first met the couple, astonished to find that her neighbor was the very artist whose books she had most treasured in her childhood. "As I came to know him," she writes, "he appeared to be the model of his tall heroes, and like them seemed puritanic, as much monk as painter, never quite coming out of the hieratic forest." Asked today what they recall most about him people invariably answer, "He never said an unkind word about anyone." Despite their financial worries, the Nielsen house was a warm and lively place, filled with friends, art, conversation, and the charmingly exotic Danish customs with which they kept their homeland close. It was also filled with baby chicks, for the couple attempted to breed and raise Cornish Game Hens to supplement their income, but after awhile this business failed too. And still Kay's art didn't sell.

In 1941, good fortune came in the form of Jasmine Britton, Supervising Librarian for the Los Angeles School System. Distressed to find an artist of Nielsen's caliber living in genteel poverty, she pulled some strings and located funds with which to hire him to create a full-scale mural for the library of the Los Angeles Central Junior High School. It was vast undertaking, a painting on which the artist spent three long years of hard work. When the mural was finally completed, it was ceremoniously unveiled to enormous acclaim; Arthur Miller called it "one of the most beautiful wall paintings in America" in the *Los Angeles Times*. One year later, the school building was taken over by the Los Angeles Board of Education for a new administrative headquarters, and the mural was stripped from the wall as the room was converted to offices. Enraged, Jasmine Britton threatened the Board with a well-publicized public scandal. They agreed to transfer the mural, and a new home for it was found at Sutter Junior High in the San Fernando Valley—but the enormous painting had been badly damaged in the course of its careless removal and storage. A further two years of work were required to restore the art in its new setting—a blow from which Kay's health, fragile at that time, never fully recovered. When the restorations were complete, he went on to a new commission—a splendid altar painting for the Wong Chapel in the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles. After this, however, it was six long years before he received another commission.

In the late 1940s, lacking all prospect of work, the Nielsens returned to Denmark, though life there was to be quite different than what they had known before. Where Kay had once been a celebrity, followed everywhere by the media, now he was aging, his work was obscure, and their country house, though charming, was also rustic and bitterly cold. Kay spent dark winter days wrapped in blankets, attempting to paint as his health grew worse. By the 1950s, the Nielsens were back in the cottage in California once more—where good fortune appeared once again in the form of another Britton sister, Helen Britton Holland, who arranged for Kay to receive a mural commission from Whitman College. It was the last major painting he would ever complete—for over the next several years his cough worsened, his frame grew thinner and thinner, and in 1957 he died quietly at home at the age of 69. Ulla made no pretense of wanting to go on with life now that her Kay was gone, and she died just 13 months later of complications from diabetes. Neither knew that a revival of Kay's life work was soon to begin.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Kay's fairy tale paintings were rediscovered as part of a general cultural reappraisal of Victorian fairy art, Pre-Raphaelite art, and Golden Age book illustration. In the latter group, Nielsen's art was ranked once again alongside Rackham's and Dulac's as the finest of the age. In America and England, Kay's pictures appeared on notecards, posters, and calendars, and facsimile editions of his various fairy tale volumes soon followed. In the 1970s, Peacock Press, under the visionary direction of Ian and Betty Ballantine (who were instrumental in popularizing Tolkien's books in America), presented a series of trade paperback volumes honoring the works of Golden Age illustrators. *Kay Nielsen,* edited by David Larkin, was published in 1975, followed in 1977 by *The Unknown Paintings of Kay Nielsen* (featuring the *Arabian Nights* paintings). Since then, Kay's work has become beloved by fans of fairy tale fiction and illustration all around the world, and a new generation of mythic artists are now as inspired by the art of Kay Nielsen as he was once inspired by Beardsley.

"Though naturally conversant with the historic advances of painting in the twentieth century," writes Hildegarde Flanner, "he remained aloof from the times in his work. Excelling in the lyrical and poetical was the ideal that absorbed him and he made no effort to modernize the subject-matter that had governed his style." Today, we can only be grateful for the artist's devotion to "the lyrical and poetical." He maintained his own unique vision to the end, leaving his wondrous pictures as gifts to the future. One can only wish that somehow Kay could know just how much we treasure them now. ❧

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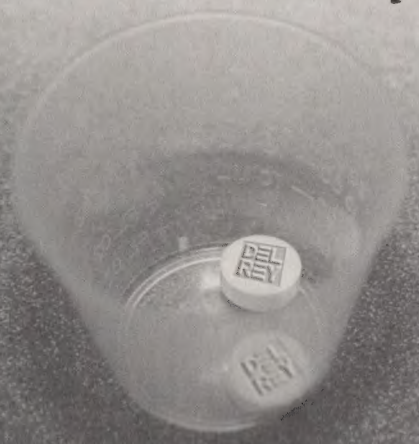

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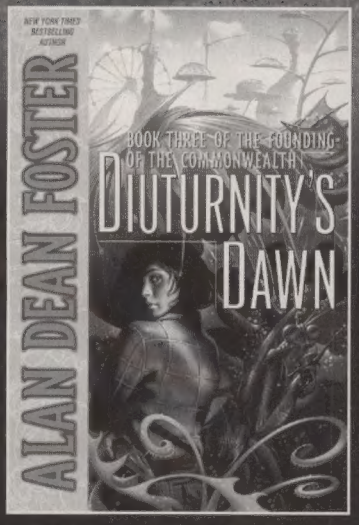

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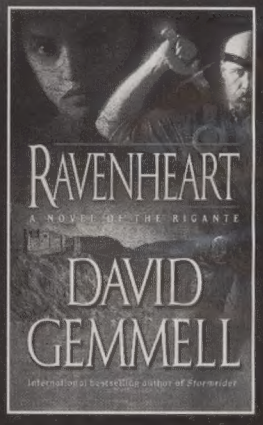

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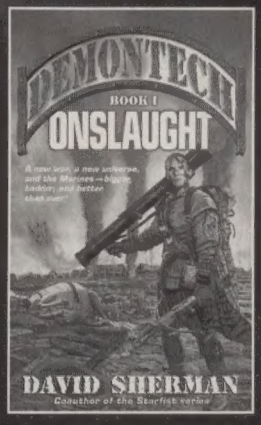

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ARI BERK is a folklorist, poet, visual artist, and scholar of literature, iconography, and comparative myth. Deeply dedicated to interdisciplinary writing, teaching, and research, Dr. Berk holds degrees in Ancient History (B.A.), American Indian Studies (M.A.), and Comparative Literature and Culture (Ph.D.). He has studied at Oxford and traveled widely, making friends in many parts of the world. Ari and his wife, Renaissance scholar Dr. Kristen McDermott, currently live near the edge of a wood in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan, where they are both assistant professors in the English department at Central Michigan University. He is currently working with internationally known artist Brian Froud on a forthcoming book, *The Runes of Elflan*. Dr. Berk's essays, poetry, and art can be found at *www.endicott-studio.com*.

THEODORA GOSS lives in Boston, Massachusetts, where she is finishing a Ph.D. in English literature. She has published poetry in magazines as different as *The Lyric* and *Dreams of Decadence*. This is her first short story publication. She enjoys teaching obscure Victorian poetry to unsuspecting undergraduates and believes, with the Duchess of Windsor, that you can never have too many books or too many cats. Visit her Web site at *www.theodoragoss. com*.

SCOTT GRIMANDO has been illustrating books, magazines, and video games for the past 13 years. He's been featured in *Heavy Metal* magazine and *The Spectrum* annual, and regularly works with Berkley Publishing and Disney. Scott recently launched *www.grimstudios.com,* a modern studio whose goal is to offer his clients a comprehensive solution, including photography and 3-D design.

LAUREN HALKON was born in England in 1973. Now engaged to a U.S. Marine, her life has all of a sudden become very interesting and full of travel. She started writing seriously four years ago and has worked her way up through the independent press, culminating in a recent appearance in *The Urbanite*. Her short story, "Spinner," will be included in the forthcoming *Octoberland Anthology* and her novel, *Night Seekers*, for which she also produced the cover art, is due out soon from Cosmos Books.

JAMES PATRICK KELLY has had an eclectic writing career. He has written novels, short stories, essays, reviews, poetry, plays, and planetarium shows. His books include *Think Like a Dinosaur and Other Stories* (1997), *Wildlife* (1994), *Heroines* (1990), *Look into the Sun* (1989), *Freedom Beach* (1986), and *Planet of Whispers* (1984). His fiction has been translated into 14 languages. He has won the Hugo Award twice: in 1996 for his novelette *Think Like a Dinosaur,* and in 2000 for his novelette *10^{16} to 1*. He is currently one of 14 councilors appointed by Governor Jeanne Shaheen to the New Hampshire State Council of the Arts.

RICHARD PARKS, besides working on both novels and short stories, is currectly assembling his first short fiction collection, tentatively titled *The Ogre's Wife and Other Fairy Tales for Grownups*. Needless to say, *Realms of Fantasy* will be well represented.

BRUCE HOLLAND ROGERS lives in Eugene, Oregon. His story collection, *Wind Over Heaven,* is a finalist for the Endeavor Award. He is also the author of *Word Work: Surviving and Thriving as a Writer,* due out in May from Invisible Cities Press.

KATYA REIMANN is the Minnesota-based author of the *Tielmaran Chronicles,* a high fantasy trilogy set in the world of "Honeysuckle Flowers." She was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award [for Best New Writer of Science Fiction and Fantasy] in 1997. Her newest novel, *Prince of Fire and Ashes,* the eagerly awaited conclusion to her trilogy, will be out from Tor in July 2002. She gave birth to identical twin daughters in 1999, much to the amusement of those familiar with Katya and her writing (the heroines of her trilogy are also identical twins). Katya admits to diverse literary influences, including T.H. White, Henry Fielding, and René de Goscinny (author of *Asterix the Gaul*). "Honeysuckle Flowers" is Katya's first short story.

WILLIAM SHUNN is a computer programmer who has worked for clients as diverse as WordPerfect and *Sesame Street*. Born in Los Angeles and raised in Utah, he now lives in Queens with his wife Laura Chavoen, whom he married in Las Vegas this past summer to the accompaniment of an Elvis impersonator, and a Siamese fighting fish named Severian. Although he mostly writes fiction, he has just completed a memoir about his days as a Mormon missionary in Canada. He accepts e-mail at bill@shunn.net. This is his second appearance in *Realms of Fantasy*.

TERRI WINDLING has been a guiding force in the development of fantasy literature for two decades, winning six World Fantasy Awards for this work. As an editor, she has created 25 anthologies, many of them in partnership with Ellen Datlow, including the *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror* annual volumes. She is also an editorial consultant for Tor Books in New York. As a writer, she has published *A Midsummer's Night Fairy Tale, The Raven Queen, The Wood Wife* (winner of the Mythopoetic Award), and other books. As an artist, her paintings on folklore themes have been exhibited at museums and galleries across America and England. She currently divides her time between homes in rural England and the Arizona desert.

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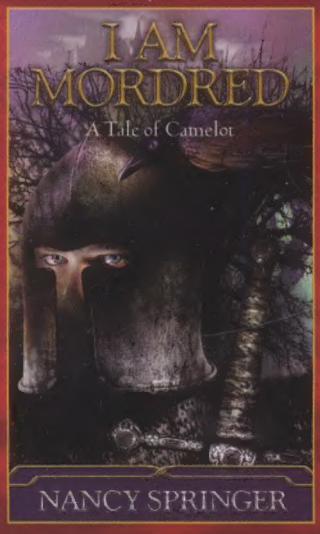

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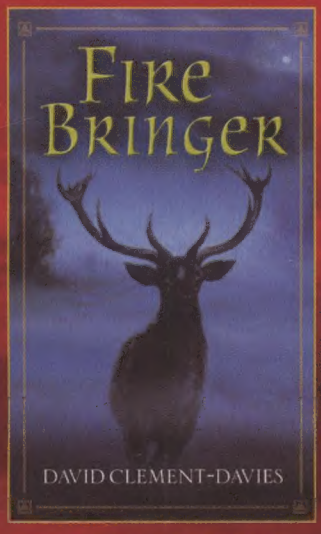

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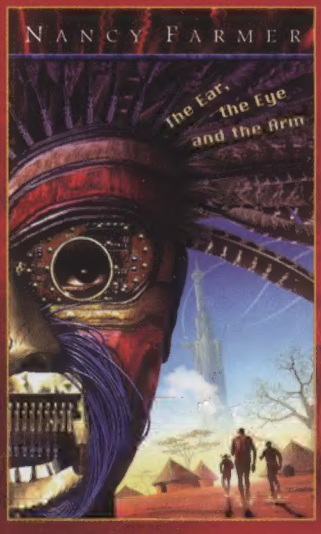

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